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MANIBEN KARA FOUNDATION

Western Railway Employees Union, Grant Road Station, Bombay - 400 007.

Maniben Kara

A TALE OF STRUGGLE & SERVICE





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V. B. KARNIK

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HIMEAN ELV

Foreword

To write a foreword to this book written by my respected friend, philosopher and guide Shri V. B. Karnik is rather presumptuous on my part; yet I could not miss this opportunity to pay my humble tribute to the memory of a great personality-Maniben Kara-who was an inspiration, a guide and a very dependable friend to many of us who belonged to her extended family. To my mind there is nobody more suitable to write about Maniben than the author who was a close associate and a good friend. In fact Maniben was a respected and much loved member of the big Karnik family. All the brothers, their wives and children looked at her as a family member to whom they could turn for almost anything. She in turn used to depend on the family for support whenever she needed it most.

It is obvious that Shri Karnik could not do real justice to the great personality like Maniben in a span of hundred pages. I wish this small book would induce one of her trade union colleagues or a student of social research to study the life of this unique woman and write in detail about her various activities and her multifaceted personality, her organizational capacity and most of all her ability to be friends with young and old, with poor and rich, with scholars and illiterate people. She would call herself an uneducated person and yet could guide one of the biggest Trade Union- the Railwaymen's Federation, she could discuss labour problems with national and international trade-union leaders, and participate in labour conferences all over the world. She was a keen student of women's problems and was a very active member of the 'Status of Women's Committee' appointed by the Government of India. She was a person who developed herself through

self-learning and experience. Every new situation was a challenge for her and she never fell short of anything she undertook to do.

Born in an upper-middle-class family with liberal outlook, Maniben became a close friend of the poor and needy. The instinct to serve others was developed into activity by her training in social work at Birmingham-England. For some time she also worked in East London and came face to face with poverty in one of the richest countries in the world. Coming home she undertook the work of organizing a Seva Mandal- a Welfare Organization- in the sweepers' colony in Byculla, at a time- late twenties- when nobody except the Missionaries worked with the backward class women and children. Maniben started the welfare activity for sweeper women and children in 1929 and put it on a permanent footing. The institute is very much active even today.

In a short time Maniben realised that only welfare work is not going to solve the problems of the poor; they must be organized to put up a fight and so from service Maniben entered the field of struggle. Throughout her life she remained a fighter but she never lost sight of service. Naturally many women's organizations needed Maniben's support and guidance. She was an active member of All India Women's Conference for a long time. Being herself a free and emancipated woman, Maniben was a great help to organizations like Streehitakarini which is working in one of the slums of Bombay with an objective of enabling women to lead a healthy, free and full life. In her short period of Presidentship of the organization, she put the organization on a strong footing by getting it a building of its own. The organization would cherish her memory and would work to deserve Maniben's faith in it.

Maniben undertook various tasks for various organizations. No job was below her. I remember when 'Udyogini' one of the women's organizations undertook to conduct a canteen for the travelling Jawans during the China War, it was difficult to find volunteers to cater to the Jawans reaching Bombay by a very early train. Maniben not only offered herself for the job but did it for quite sometime. Several such instances could be quoted by her friends from different fields.

Maniben's capacity to make friends was amazing. You could meet almost anybody in her 'Darbar', as her intimate friends used to call her evening gathering of friends. Her's was an open house and anybody could walk in and bring with him or her a friend or a relation. You could meet a foreign diplomat or a labour leader, a member of any political party, a scholar or a student, a woman worker or a Government officer. This was often a cosmopolitan gathering and people belonging to all religions, castes and creed and vocations would be present. She was cordial and hospitable to all. One could hardly go away from her place without partaking a meal or at least a cup of tea and snacks. Our friend Rane has compared Maniben with a Banyan tree. To my mind she was much more than that. She did take many under her friendly and protective canopy, but she never failed to bring out the best out of people and enable them to grow into independent personalities. Many women workers and trade-union workers have grown under her patronage and have enriched their own lives and that of their organizations.

Maniben was one of the founder members of Radical Democratic Party and Indian Federation of Labour. But her association with M. N. Roy goes back to early thirties before Roy was arrested and sentenced to a long term of

imprisonment. She remained a close friend of Roy and Ellen all her life. Maniben was one of the most popular and important members of both the organizations. She gave her sole attention and energy to the Party-work. She travelled all over India to organize labour in support of the Party line, went to England to acquaint the British labour with the political stand of IFL, facing the dangers of Hitler's deadly missiles. She was one of the few persons to whom the Party turned to whenever it faced crisis and I think there were several ones which Maniben helped to get over. She was the person who met people who could help her collect funds for the Party. Once she even offered to pawn whatever little jewellery she had to raise funds for election. (It was so little that nobody gave us any money for that.) She told me once she had some gold ornaments which were stolen and felt liberated from the burden, and how her father who was her great friend also- helped her to celebrate the occasion by taking her out for dinner.

Maniben was a great orator. She could hold the audience spellbound in all the languages she knew. In fact language was no barrier. She could speak in English, Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati. I have heard her ringing voice in workers' rallies and also hersuasive argument in meetings of intellectuals. She could be a powerful speaker, very militant and effective. With age she mellowed down but the fighting spirit was always dormant in her. Her real contribution both to trade union movement and public life in the country is the innumerable men and women whom she has inspired and trained to undertake public life seriously and sincerely. She herself was a beautiful combination of struggle and service.

There was lot of struggle in her private life. But she never succumbed to difficulties and frustrations. She always

came out of a struggle to lead a new life and achieve a greater height. Her father was a great support to her in every way.

Maniben never toed the line of any political party. I feel she joined the Radical Democratic Party because she knew that this was the only party which cherished the idea of true freedom, freedom for all and gave scope for development of every individual and encouraged independent thinking. Born free she remained free all her life. That is why she was a unique person herself and encouraged everybody in their fight for freedom not only political, economic and social but also individual. She was the only woman in trade union movement for a long time and achieved her place in the movement as a respected leader, recognised by all, the government, the labour and by the international labour organizations.

We had the good fortune to belong to her family of close friends and I was happy when Karnik undertook to write this book. I am grateful to him for doing an excellent job of it. He has kept himself in the background throughout the narrative but I know he shared many adventures with Maniben and was one of her best friends. Inspite of this fact the book is very objective and gives bare facts about Maniben's life and activities. I am sure all would enjoy and benefit by the story of a dedicated, free and emancipated life of a great woman.

I pay my humble respects to the memory of my great and beloved friend.

Indumati Parikh

This is not a biography of Maniben. She deserves a fulllength biography which I hope some younger person will do in course of time. This is only a record of my impressions and reminiscences of Maniben and her work.

I met Maniben for the first time in 1931. I had seen her earlier at a meeting at the Prarthana Samaj, Bombay, where she was one of the speakers. It was a social subject that was discussed at the meeting. She made an impassioned speech in support of the social reform that was being advocated. I do not remember what she spoke on that occasion. The way she spoke, however, left a deep impression on my mind. The speech was eloquent as well as reasoned. This was sometime in 1930.

In 1931 when I met her, we, the Roy group, had arranged a meeting at Jinnah Hall on some political problem. Maniben was one of the speakers. I had been told earlier that somebody would contact me at the meeting and take me to Roy's place. Roy was in hiding at that time. Maniben met me at the meeting and told me that I should go along with her after the meeting was over. That was enough of a hint for me. We were very secretive in those days. The police were hot in chase of Roy.

We knew he would be arrested one day or the other. He was also prepared for it. But we wanted to delay the event as long as possible. Very few persons were allowed to meet him and know of his place of residence which was changed pretty often. Maniben was one of the persons entrusted with the work of finding safe places for Roy. After the metting she took me to her car—it was a small Baby Austin. I got into the car and Maniben drove me to a place off Peddar Road, it was a big bunglow. We walked

through the drawing room and went to the back side. There was a small bunglow built on the garages. It was meant for servants. But Roy was temporarily accommodated there. I was directed to go up to the first floor and I saw Roy seated in the balcony. It had just been flooded by a sharp shower of rain. It was the rainy season. When Roy and I were discussing, Maniben came with a cup of tea for both of us. She was in a hurry to go. So I cut short my discussion and went with her. It was a short visit and, having seen the place, I could thereafter meet Roy from time to time according to our mutual convenience. Roy was generally free, but having just started practising at the Bombay High Court, 1 was not the master of my time. Maniben dropped me in Girgaum where I was staying. Thereafter I met her several times in the course of our work.

Later I became a close colleague and co-worker of Maniben and had several opportunities to see her work. I continued to be closely associated with her until her death in October 1979. The following pages will tell of my impressions of her work and my reminiscences of those near about fifty years of our working together. I have added information about her family background and school days and her visit to U. K. in 1928 on the basis of information received from members of her family and what I remember to have gathered from her. I have also persuaded some friends to give me notes to refresh my memory about some events. Maniben's was an evenful life, but there are many facts of which I have no personal knowledge. I have also not delved into her personal life. As stated earlier, this does not purport to be a full record of her life.

Acknowledgements

In the preparation of these memoirs, the author has received help from many quarters. It is not possible to name them and express my obligations to them. I am grateful to all of them. A few, however, require special mention. I am grateful to –

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- (d) The Maniben Kara Foundation for undertaking to publish the book;
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- (g) The Prajna Press, Wai, its Manager, Shri. S. G. Dixit and workers for the personal interest that they took in the printing of the book.

V. B. KARNIK



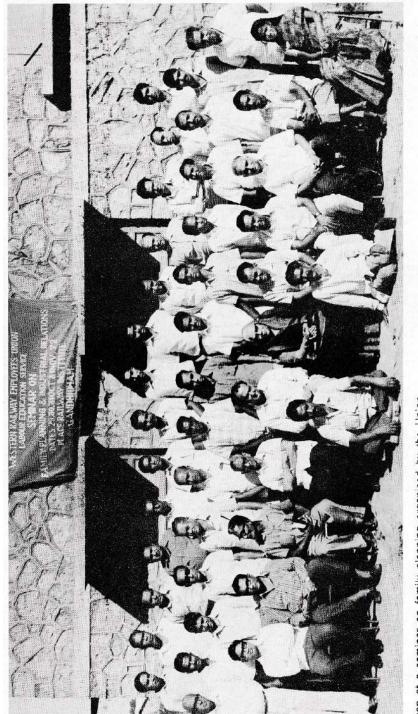
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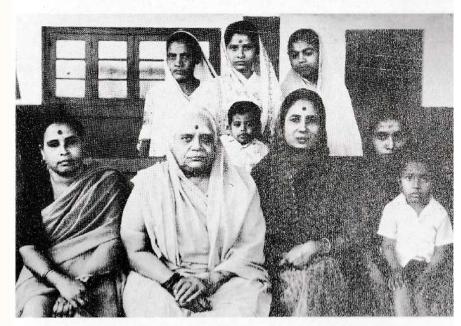
Mr. Oldenbroek, General Secretary of ICFTU discussing a point with Maniben at a neeting of it. Executive Board in Brussels.



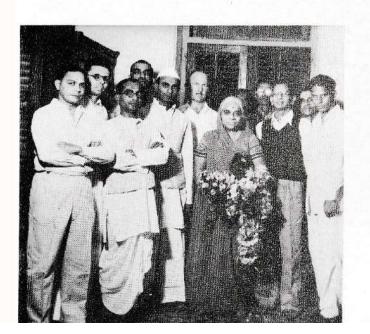
Maniben receiving the Padmashri award from the President Shri V. V. Giri.



ben at a seminar on family planning organised by the Unior



Maniben with family members of the Union.





Maniben being greeted on Railway travel.





Kara Family; in the



Maniben with some officers of the Union.

Family Background

It is usual to say that Maniben was born rich. She came from an affluent Bhatiya family which had settled down in Bombay for a generation or two. Maniben's younger brother Shri Shantikumar Kara, who has kindly written a note for me on her family background and schooling, objects to the adjective "affluent." He says that she came from a "middle class family." But there are so many stratas in the middle class that one may without fear of contradiction say that she belonged to one of the higher ones. The Kara family came from Kutch. They had left nothing behind in Kutch, and regarded Bombay as their home. They were in the cloth trade. They had an esteemed place in the community.

Maniben's father, late Liladhar Kara was a social reformer. He had joined the Arya Samaj along with a few of his friends. He did not believe in idol worship and gave equal treatment to his sons and daughters. So it was a free atmosphere in which Maniben grew up. Her father gave her full freedom to behave as she liked without the restrictions that are generally imposed on a girl in a Hindu family. Her father trained her to be rational in her behaviour. And yet she had to go through the thread-giving ceremony prescribed by the Arya Samaj for both boys and girls.

Shri Shanti Kumar Kara's note states further:

"Maniben was born on a full moon day (Mahasud Poonam) in the year 1905. It happened to be a moon eclipse though her birth was not during the period of

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the eclipse. It is believed amongst the Hindus that the earth's atmosphere is fouled owing to eclipse and purification is sought by giving alms to the poor and having a dip in the river or sea. Neither Maniben, nor other members of the family, except our dear mother, strictly observed these or such other rituals.

"Maniben cannot be said to have derived her motivation for social service because of the position of heavenly bodies calling for alms-giving. Maniben derived her inspiration for social service because of her association with a Christian Missionary School - St. Columba at Gamdevi, Bombay. It is pertinent to recall here that Maniben was greatly influenced by one Mrs. Maclean who was the Principal of St. Columba School. This noble British lady used to visit our home frequently during Maniben's studies and even after her (Mrs. Maclean's) retirement to England - that is whenever she visited India. She felt happy and proud that her pupil had gained respectable position in the trade union movement and came tobe known as a leading social worker. Mrs. Maclean was particularly happy that as a trade union leader, while fighting for the legitimate rights of workers, Maniben laid emphasis on the social side of workers' life.

"Maniben began her schooling at Chandaramji Girl's High School, a private school in the heart of Girgaum. Later she changed to St. Columba High School at Gamdevi, Bombay - a Christian Missionary Institution. I do not know why Maniben changed the school from Chandaramji to St. Columba - may be because my father felt that the latter was a better school. In fact, this change of school can be said to be a turning point in her life in the sense that her inclinations were given a push towards social work. Maniben was not a particularly bright student. She could not get through her matric examination.

What she lacked in her academic education, she more than made up for it in the University of life. Even as a student Maniben was known for her boldness and qualities of leadership.

Family Background

"I understand from another sister of mine, now Mrs. Madhuriben Khatau, who studied at the same Chandaramji School, but who was Maniben's junior by about 4/5 years- that in the year 1920 when Tilak died, the School authorities would not close the School for the day as a mark of respect to late Tilak. Thereupon, Maniben went round to every classroom and asked the girls to boycott classes which resulted in the School remaining deserted. My sister Madhuriben vividly remembers the incident because she had also gone to her (Madhuriben's) class and prevailed upon the students to empty it.

"Maniben had manifold extra-curricular activities. She came in touch with a group of Christian missionaries who were engaged in a variety of social activities. Prominent among them was Principal Maclean and his wife Mrs. Maclean, Their friendship continued throughout Maniben's life. The Macleans spoke to Maniben about Christ and the Christian religion. They left a deep impression upon her mind. They also drew her attention to the social work that could be done in the city of Bombay. Under their influence Maniben started doing social work even during her school days. She began to visit slums and engaged herself in cleanliness and educational work. She also did some work in the vigilance field. She used to tell later about some of the interesting experiences she had during the course of the rescue work in which she was engaged."

The failure to pass the matriculation examination had a depressing effect upon Maniben. She did not want to continue her studies. At that time her father suggested to

her a visit to England to learn about social work. The visit became possible according to the note because of one of the family friends, late Mr. Ranchordas Lotewalla, was in the habit of going to England practically every year. He promised to look after Maniben and arrange for her training in a reputed institution. Maniben went to England in 1928 and joined the Birmingham University to take a diploma course in social work. The study in England was very useful from the point of view of her development. She returned in a year or so after securing a diploma and acquiring a good deal of experience in social work. That happened sometime in 1930.

The note mentioned above gives a few more details about Maniben's visit to U. K. and its long-term effect upon her personality. It says:

"My parents had a large family- five sons and four daughters. Maniben was the second eldest. Being the eldest amongst the sisters and a large family to look after, mother naturally had to rely upon Maniben for help in nursing and in general looking after her younger brothers and sisters- some mischievous, some less mischievous, but mischievous all the same. However, none of us recollect Maniben having been harsh. No doubt she was short-tempered and easily excitable but never vindictive. She would apologise for being angry and soon make up for having wounded the feelings of others. One special characteristic of Maniben which we all remember is the role she played as a nurse when any one of us fell ill.

"After completing her schooling up to VII Standard and knowing Maniben's keen interest in social work my father, on the advice of Mrs. Maclean- principal of St. Columba School, decided that Maniben should go to England for a Social Science diploma, the underlying idea being that foreign travel and association with English mode

of life would help his daughter to build up discipline and character. How very right my father was in his judgement ! I am able to confirm this personally from my own foreign tours. A few concrete examples here would not be out of place. In the year 1928 Maniben was sent to England for her social science diploma and she stayed in a Women's Hostel in Birmingham. The place was known as Sally Oak situated in some wooded area in the city of Birminghaman industrial city. As it happened, there was a Boy Scouts: Jamboree at Birkenhead near Liverpool. I was then 11 years: of age but my father encouraged me to attend this Jamboree: - the object being to learn the discipline of a Boy Scout and also to see England and Europe with a view to broaden my horizen in life. This tour proved to be a great booster in my life in the matter of self confidence, courage and character building. As I was in England and that too not far from Birmingham, Maniben had arranged to take me to her hostel to spend a day with her. It was a great joy for me and her to meet in a foreign land. I was very much impressed by the discipline and the etiquette maintained at this ladies hostel. Maniben owes a great deal to the overall atmosphere that prevailed in the hostel and her association with English life. Even as a boy of eleven, I felt impressed by this visit to Europe and Maniben's hostel helped me to build discipline and character. Small courtesies like saying thank you, not to speak too loudly, formation of Q's, consideration towards others are hall-mark of English life. These may appear trivial to some and yet observance of these etiquettes make life richer."

The note concludes:

"An example of Maniben's generosity needs a special mention as it concerns me personally. In the year 1936, I wanted to go to England for my higher studies in Economics. The period before the War was hard financially for the family and my father was embarrassed to refuse me permission. Promptly, Maniben came to my rescue by insisting that father sell her jewellery worth Rs. 2,000/3,000 but enough to meet atleast half the cost. However, both myself and father declined to accept her jewellery. Somehow my father was able to manage funds from some Bhatia Trust for my higher education."

Shri Shantikumar Kara, who has written the note, was very close to Maniben throughout her life, particularly in the last decade or so. She used to consult him on the many problems that she had to face from time to time in her private and public life. His advice was always welcome and was never disregarded.

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Sailor Press

It was through the Sailor Press that Maniben came in contact with a group of political workers who came to be known as the Roy Group. The press does not exist now. But according to the standard of those days, it was a fairly big press. It was situated on the road opposite the Babulnath Temple. Maniben looked after it as a licensee for a year or so.

Since her return from U. K., Maniben was keen on securing economic independence. Her father did not appreciate the idea, but he did not stand in the way of his daughter looking out for economic independence. In the end, it was through him that Maniben secured the licence of the Sailor Press. The Press belonged to a Hindu Orphanage and Shri Liladhar Kara had some friends among the trustees of the orphange. He persuaded them to hand over the press to Maniben as a licensee. The press was not running well during those days and the trustees had no hesitation in handing over its management to Maniben. She took it over and had the intention of running it as a commercial venture. She hoped to secure business for the press through her many acquaintances so that it could pay proper wages to workers and also a small allowance to the person who managed it. She used to go to the press early in the morning and was busy with it throughout the day.

One morning a young gentleman went to the press with some work which he wanted to be done on an urgent basis. He went in a big car and made a good impression when he started talking to Maniben about his work. He wanted some 75,000 copies of a small manifesto. Maniben was taken by surprise by the large number of copies that he wanted to be printed. Tayab Shaikh always wanted things to be done on a big scale. The manifesto that he brought was supposed to have been drafted by M. N. Roy, the mysterious figure in the Indian Communist movement. Roy was supposed to be coming to India shortly and Tayab Shaikh wanted the manifesto to be distributed on a wide scale in Bombay and other places. He never bothered about the machinery that would be required for distribution. We were then a small group and could not have distributed on our own more than a few thousand copies. That, however, did not bother Tayab.

Maniben made some calculations of the expenses and gave the figure to Tayab Shaikh. He accepted it in a cavalier manner and said that the amount would be paid on delivery. Maniben wanted some advance. Tayab put his hand in his trouser pocket and pulled out a brand new hundred rupee note. He handed it over to Maniben. She used to tell in later days that, that was the first and last payment for printing that she ever received from Tayab.

The transaction is not important. Very likely just a few hundred copies of the manifesto were printed and Tayab forgot that he had ordered a much larger number, because there was never any need for the much larger number that he had ordered. Financially the transaction did not cause any loss to the press. It is important because it brought Maniben in contact with the Roy Group. Tayab had a very attractive and impressive personality. He must have talked to Maniben a good deal about Roy, his personality and programme and persuaded her to work with Roy when he came to India. Maniben had no idea then that Roy was a "proclaimed offender" and it would be dangerous to work with him. Later when Roy

arrived in Bombay in December 1930, Tayab used her as one of the persons who could find safe shelters for Roy. She had already found a couple of them and was actually sheltering him on the day that I went with her. That was how I came in contact with Maniben when she took me to the hiding place that she had arranged for Roy at Peddar Road.

Maniben did not continue with the Press for a long time. Soon she got involved in social and political work and had no time to look after the Press. She handed over the press back to the Orphange which owned it. Her desire for economic independence was, however, irrepressible. She sought many ways to secure it. For sometime she was working as an agent of the Warden Insurance Co. Her involvement in the political and trade union work again made it impossible for her to go about canvassing business for the Insurance Company. She did for a year or two and then gave it up in the interest of her public work. By that time she was a full-fledged Royist. Her zest for social work was, however, innate. She began it during her school days and continued it after her return from U. K.

After returning from U. K. Maniben was keen on beginning social work as early as possible. She wanted to put to use the knowledge and experiences that she had gained in that country. She had secured a diploma and had also worked for a few weeks in the East End of London.

She was keen on beginning her social work in an organised manner and on a permanent basis. She collected some donations and also consulted some persons who had actual experience of social work. She consulted particularly Shri N. M. Joshi, who had a big reputation as a trade union leader and also as a social worker. The friendship that was then formed continued throughout Shri Joshi's life. Maniben found a good friend of her age in his daughter,

Smt. Bhikubai. She helped her to go to U. K. to be trained as a social worker. Unfortunately Bhikubai died an early death after her return from U. K. Maniben's friends amongst Christian missionaries were also of help to her.

It was necessary to find a proper location for the social work. After a good deal of search, Maniben selected a place near the Byculla Post Office. There were a number of Improvement Trust Chawls at that place. A number of Municipal servants were staying in those chawls, most of them belonging to the Sanitation Department of the Municipality. They were working as sweepers and belonged to the depressed classes. They were poor and had little idea of cleanliness and sanitation.

Maniben decided to work in that locality. Her main objective was to try to teach the children and women of the locality to live better. She secured a small place in the locality. Her hours of work were from about 12 noon to about 4 or 5 in the afternoon. She went around the chawls and made acquaintances. She selected half a dozen women of the locality to act as the nucleus of her work. She began by asking them to come to the centre every day for a couple of hours. She began telling them of the importance of cleanliness and how small children could be trained to keep clean without much effort. For sometime it was just exhortation. Later she began asking them to bring their children to the centre and showed them how the children could be kept clean. It was actually a demonstration with the use of soap and other materials. In a few weeks she developed a Mothers' Club, encouraging mothers to bring their children to the centre at the time convenient to them. It was necessary then to have some staff for the centre. A couple of voluntary workers from other areas were brought in and a couple

of women from the locality were also trained for a variety of work that had developed at the centre. There were classes for the children, teaching them the three Rs as well as the habit of cleanlieness. Stories were told in the class to make the teaching as interesting as possible. Prizes were also awarded for cleanliness and good conduct. Sports were arranged. Donors were secured for giving the children of the locality useful clothes.

Mothers' Club used to meet from time to time and discuss the difficulties the mothers were facing. Their main complaint was that they had no money to purchase soap. In the beginning some cakes of soap were secured for them as donation. But later on it was emphasised that soap was as much a necessary item as other essential items and that they must purchase it out of their meagre income. Ways were suggested to make economy on other items.

There was a Municipal school nearby. But the children of the locality were not keen on attending it. Special effiorts were then made to persuade the parents to send their children to the school. Whenever necessary text books were secured for the children attending the school. Prizes were awarded to those attending the school regularly. Some efforts were also made to secure medical attention for the children and the women of the locality. In course of time the centre became popular as a place where guidance could be secured on a variety of problems faced by the residents. There was a good deal of drunkenness in the locality and in many cases the drunken husbands used to beat their wives. Lessons in temperance were arranged at the centre. Some complaints were also filed with the police. But generally the results were not satisfactory. Indebtedness was another evil. The workers used to fall in arrears in the payment of rent as also the payments to be made to grocers. Money lenders were hovering about the locality and the workers used to borrow from them at heavy rates of interest. Maniben used to advise the workers and their wives about how to live within their means and how to avoid spending on drinks. She was listened to with respect. But generally the workers continued to behave in the same manner from month to month.

From those talks and other materials Maniben came to know of the economic conditions in the locality. In course of time she came to the conclusion that it would not be possible to reform their lives without bringing about a substantial improvement in their economic conditions. It is this experience which led her to the trade union movement in which she jumped in a year or so. After beginning her work in the locality Maniben established an institution for conducting it on a permanent and regular basis. It was called Seva Mandir. In course of time Maniben became so much involved in her trade union and political work that she had no time to look after the work of the centre. It was then that she decided to hand over the management of the centre to Bhagini Samaj, a well known Womens' organization in Bombay. She had already built a small place on the grounds secured from the Municipality. The centre is now a land mark in the locality and is conducting its work on the lines laid down by Maniben.

In the case of Maniben the urge for social work was so powerful that it did not become less even after she shifted to other fields of work. Even then she would devote attention to the social work whenever there were calls for it. She would do it herself or through some organization including adhoc committees established for the purpose.

Many a time workers having grievances about unjustified supercession or termination of service approached her. If there was a union Maniben would refer the applicant to the union concerned and also speak to the officers of the union to pay, particular attention to the grievance. If there was no union, she would herself take up the matter with the officer concerned and try to persuade him to look at the case in a sympathetic manner. Generally, she used the telephone for the purpose. But sometimes she was required to make a personal visit in order to explain the grievance. Sometimes she had to spend days and weeks to get the matter settled. She did not mind the loss of time and energy. If the grievance was particularly over an unjust or unfair act of an authority she would not rest until it was rectified. Through such personal approaches she was able to secure justice in many cases. In course of time this type of work merged into her trade union work.

A couple of instances of her organized social work after she had left it can be mentioned. In April 1944 there was a big explosion in the Bombay Docks. A cargo ship, Fort Stikene, carrying a large quantity of arms and ammunition exploded while discharging her cargo. The explosion destroyed a large part of the Victoria and Alexandra Docks, killed many persons and rendered a number of persons homeless and jobless. Maniben was not at that time directly involved in any dock workers' organization. As soon as the news of the disaster reached her, she organised relief for the dock workers, who were rendered homeless and jobless. A number of them were also injured. Arrangements were made to send them to hospitals and to look after them while they were under treatment. A relief kitchen was opened to provide food; many dock workers took advantage of it. Maniben made appeals for funds to grain merchants and others. There was a good response to the appeal and she was able to run the kitchen for more than a week. The Labour Minister of those days, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, visited the kitchen one day and expressed satisfaction with the relief work that Maniben and her colleagues had organized.

Another instance of similar social service that Maniben rendered was at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971. Every day a number of wounded soldiers used to arrive in Bombay by trains. A social organization was necessary to meet them on their arrival and to look after their needs before they were transferred to the Army Hospitals. Maniben constituted a ladies' committee. She and the other ladies had to go to V. T. and Bombay Central Stations early in the morning when the trains arrived. They would meet the soldiers and give them tea or coffee and snacks, enquire after their other needs and give them a feeling that their services were being appreciated. The ladies' committee which was formed under the leadership of Maniben continued this work for over a fortnight. It was highly appreciated by the army authorities.

Apart from such organized efforts, which went on as long as they were needed, Maniben had always a visitor or two at her place, requesting her attention to his/her problem. Many a time there were domestic problems of quarrels between husband and wife or complaints against landlords or government officers. Sometimes they requested her assistance to get a job. Maniben always did her best to help the visitors. But her efforts were not always successful.

There was a washer-woman staying near her place. She had lost her place when the Municipal authorities pulled down her building because it was in a dangerous condition. She had been promised then, that she would be provided alternate accommodation, when the place was rebuilt. She was given alternate accommodation in a suburb of Bombay. She did not want to go there as all her business was in the city. Later the building that was pulled

down was rebuilt. But she did not get the place that was supposed to have been promised to her. The fact was that she was not entitled to a place there as she was only a licencee. She had collected copies of a large number of applications she had made to various authorities. She would go to Maniben's place for several days with all her papers to persuade Maniben to use her good offices to secure a place for her. Maniben was touched by the plight in which the washer-woman found herself. With the rules and regulations that were prevalent, it was not possible for her to secure any relief. The washer woman continued to visit Maniben from time to time though she was told that nothing could be done for her relief. Maniben persuaded many of her acquaintances to take interest in the case. She spent quite a lot of time over the washer woman's complaint. Many tried to persuade her not to waste any more time over the case; but Maniben was not deterred. Once she was convinced that an injustice had been done, she would not give up the case, whatever the time and energy that she had to spend over it. There were many such cases where owing to the rules and regulations it was impossible to get anything done. But she would continue the agitation, hoping that one day or the other justice would be done or atleast some relief would be secured.

Similar was the case of a rich jeweller's widowed daughter-in-law who was deprived of all her ornaments after the death of her husband, and was turned out of the house to fend for herself. Maniben tried personal entreaties as well as legal action. In the end the daughter-in-law got her ornaments back, but no other relief.

The time and energy that Maniben used to spend over these types of cases was a serious drain on her health and capacities and the results were so pitiful. When friends wondered if all those efforts were worth all the bother, 16 Maniben Kara

she used to silence them be telling what she had learnt from Gandhiji. Sometime in 1930 she had spent a week or so in Gandhiji's ashram. She was not impressed by his techniques of spinning and weaving. But she was impressed—and the impression lasted till her death—by Gandhiji's insistence on social work irrespective of results. The lesson that she learnt was roughly the following: "It is better to wipe the tear from a weeping eye than to write books or deliver speeches or carry on other political activities." Maniben continued to wipe tears from weeping eyes while engaging herself in political as well as trade union work.

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In Trade Unions

Maniben was fond of social work and carried it on till the end. Social work, was not, however the mission of her life. The mission of her life was social revolution. She desired the end of the present-day society of poverty and misery and inequality and its replacement by a society of equality and freedom. She knew that this could be done only through a revolutionary political party with a proper programme and a proper method of work. She found both in Roy. She, therefore, decided to follow Roy and became a full-fledged Royist.

It was as a Royist that she entered the trade union field. In those days it was difficult to distinguish between political and trade union work. The two came together as the Government considered both objectionable. Through her Seva Mandir, Maniben was already in touch with Municipal workers. Having seen their poverty and misery from close quarters, she decided to organise them into a union. She secured a room in the Improvement Trust Chawls at Byculla and made it into the office of the Union.

Those were the days of conflicts between Royists and Communists whom we used to designate in those days as "Official Communists". The Communists did not like Maniben carrying on trade union work. They tried to run her down as a person who distributed toffees and lemon drops to the children of Municipal workers in order to attract them to her fold and away from their Unions. But she had been doing it for over a year

and the Communists did not object to it then. But, according to them, trade union work was their monopoly and nobody but a Communist should intrude upon it. There was a propaganda campaign against Maniben and many attempts were made to dissuade workers from joining her Union. Having begun in a systematic manner to listen to all complaints and grievances of workers and sending representations to the authorities for their redress, more and more workers started joining the Union and regarding Maniben as their leader.

The thirties, the third decade of the century, were very difficult for workers. The economic crisis which began in the U.S. A. had spread all over the world. Even in India there were wage-cuts and retrenchments. All industries including Textiles and Railways were affected by the crisis and employers and capitalists were trying to transfer the burden of the crisis to the shoulders of workers through wage-cuts and retrenchments. This was not the proper time for development of Trade Unions. As a matter of fact, in the first four years of the thirties there was a steep fall in the number of Unions and in the number of their members.

It was through her devoted work and regular attention to the day-to-day complaints of workers that Maniben was able to win and retain the loyalty of Municipal workers. The representations made by her were heard with respect by Ward Officers and by higher authorities. Thus she was able to secure some relief for her members.

This day-to-day work for securing immediate relief to workers was unknown to Communists and was then regarded by them as counter-revolutionary. They believed only in strikes, many of which used to end in failure, owing to grave unemployment and economic distress that prevailed at that time. They resented the Royists taking away unions from them and trying to build them into strong organisations.

The Roy group had emerged as a disciplined group of political and trade union workers soon after Roy's return to India in December 1930. The group entered the trade union movement in Bombay through the Congress Labour Committee. It was formed by Congress authorities to spread and popularise the message of the national movement among industrial workers. Attitude towards the Congress was one of the Roy Group's differences with the Communists. The Group regarded the Congress as a national movement which was to be broadened and deepened. To the Communists the Congress was a counterrevolutionary party of the upper classess which was to be opposed and exposed in every possible manner. This and other differences led to many scuffles between Royists and Communists. Maniben did not escape their attention. She stood in the forefront and was ready to face any attack that came. This endeared her to the members of the Union as well as to other workers.

In a few months, Maniben's work spread to textile workers. There were already two Unions amongst them:

- 1. a Communist union which was called the Lalbawta Union (Red Flag Union) and
- 2. the Union which was headed by workers like Tawade, Kandalkar, Mhapankar, Abdul Majid and others. About this time the second Union invited Royists to join the Union and help it in its fight against employers and Communists. Along with other Royists, Maniben also joined the Union. At that time there was a strike in the Khatau Mills at Byculla. One of Maniben's younger sisters was married into the Khatau family. Those watching her career thought that she would not join the Union activists

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and take part in picketing at the gate, of her sister's mill. They were all astounded when they saw Maniben taking part in picketing and other activities in support of the strike. This enhanced her prestige amongst textile and other workers.

Maniben was an accomplished orator. Loudspeakers were not much in use in those days. She was one of the few labour leaders in the textile field who could make her voice reach the last man in the maidan. Large meetings were usually held in maidans like the Kamgar Maidan, the Lalbaug Maidan and the Delisle Road Maidan. They were also held in lanes passing through workers' residences and at the mill gates. Maniben was a popular speaker in all these different kinds of meetings. Earlier there used to be quite a number of mistakes in her Marathi speeches. But she could make herself understood by workers. In course of time she improved her Marathi. Later, she was elected to the Managing Committee of the Girni Kamgar Union and she could speak well and forcefully even in those meetings.

Those were days of strikes and lockouts. There was no recognition to the Union and millowners would give a hearing to labour leaders only when there was a strike or lockout. In those days of economic depression, it was difficult to secure any additional concession. The main objective used to be to retain whatever had been gained and to see that no wage-cut or retrenchment took place. Even a cent per cent strike could not bring the desired result. Workers had little stying-power and unemployment was rife. There used to be clashes between the police and the strikers. The strikers used to block entry of strike-breakers to whom the police used to grant protection. There were then clashes between the police and the strikers and firing and lathi charges were very common. Many

were apprehensive that Maniben would not be able to stand those clashes between the police and the strikers. But she was always in the forefront of strikers which persuaded the police on many occasions to be a little more gentle in their handling of strikers.

These unequal fights between the strikers and Millowners could not continue too long and in many cases strikes had to be withdrawn without getting any benefits. Maniben would on such occasions counsel patience to workers and ask them to retain their unity and wait for better days. These forceful struggles on behalf of textile workers persuaded workers of many other industries to look to Maniben for leadership and guidance. The most important amongst them were dock workers. A Union had already been established amongst them by two Royists, Dr. M. R. Shetty and Shri. A. N. Sheti who were respectively the President and General Secretary of the Union. A strike broke out amongst them in April 1932 for abolition of the contract system and for an increase in wages. The strike went on for about two weeks and ended after securing a 25% increase in wages. It was rather a violent strike and there were many clashes between the strikers and strike-breakers. Maniben was at the scene practically every day. She used to address workers every morning and spend the rest of the day trying to secure a settlement. In the end she succeeded in persuading prominent stevedores to agree to a settlement. The settlement strengthened the union which in later years grew into the mighty Transport and Dock Workers' Union.

Maniben was already at work in the Municipal Workers' Union. She had also to take interest in the Hawkers' Union and the Bombay Tailoring Workers' Union. Hawkers' meetings used to be held about midnight. Maniben did not fail to attend the meetings even at that

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hour. She succeeded in the end in persuading the municipality to increase the number of licences and the police to deal leniently with the hawkers.

The municipal workers also resorted to a strike about that time. On the second or third day of the strike a good number of leading workers who were mostly drainage workers and their mukadams were arrested by the police under the Bombay Municipal Servants' Act. That demoralised the strikers and the strike collapsed. On another occasion, she scored a victory against the municipality. She was at that time a Corporator. One day she and her fellow Corporator, Dr. Choksi went to a sweeper's chawl to persuade them to unite under the banner of the union, to send their children to schools and to observe the habit of cleanliness. The municipal authorities regarded the entry of the two Corporators as an illegal trespass and asked the police to arrest them. Later, they were released as it was realised that the entry of a Corporator into a municipal building was not an illegal trespass.

All these activities made Maniben known all over the country as a militant trade unionist. There were calls upon her to take part in the national organisation, the All India Trade Union Congress. There was a split in the Congress at its Nagpur sesson in 1929 and the Congress went in the hands of the Communists. Anxious for revolution, they neglected the day-to-day work of the Congress. Most trade union leaders were convinced that the Congress should be rescued from the hands of the Communists, and unity must be established with the moderate group who had seceded at the Nagpur session. Maniben was prominent amongst those who were actively working for the cause of unity and for rescuing the Congress from the hands of the Communists. Before his arrest, Roy had prepared and published a Platform of Unity on the basis of which efforts

of unity were to be made. The platfrom laid down the fundamental principles of trade union work in the India of the day. Maniben adhered to the platform and made it the basis of her work in trade unions. The Congress was rescued from the hands of the Communists at the next session held in Calcutta in June 1931. Royists were led by Tayab Shaikh from Bombay and Rajani Mukherjee from Calcutta. Maniben was not present in Calcutta. But her work in Bombay helped the Royists and others to oust the Communists from their positions in the Congress. By that time the nationalists led by Subhaschandra Bose, R. S. Ruikar and others were also disillusioned with Communists and they also wanted to break the alliance with them. Finding themselves in a miserable minority in Calcutta, the Communists walked out of the Congress, deciding to establish their new organisation, the Red Trade Union Congress. That was a good riddance, everybody in the AITUC thought; and all turned their attention to building it up as a strong functioning organisation.

All Royists in Bombay including Maniben, were delighted at the news from Calcutta. Roy who was then in hiding in Bombay was also happy at this first victory of his comrades. They became in the next few days and months the main target of the anger and fury of Communists.

Iv In Politics

Maniben took to politics like a duckling to water. She was sensitive to all political developments taking place around her in 1930. Many a time she thought of jumping into the Civil Disobedience Movement started by Gandhiji. If she had done that she would have been of immense help to the Congress movement. But in the middle of 1930 she came in touch with Roy's thoughts which appealed to her far more than Gandhiji's charkha, khadi and flooding jails. She felt more drawn to Roy's programme of linking the day-to-day struggles of the people with the national movement, and of making it more effective and more concerned with the peoples' welfare. Maniben's politics was politics not only of national independence but also of social and economic emancipation.

Her politics began with her association with Roy early in 1931. Roy was then a proclaimed offender and having anything to do with him was by itself a penal offence. That, however, did not deter Maniben from associating with Roy and arranging safe shelters for him. She was already engaged in that work when a fresh responsibility fell upon her with the arrival in Bombay, sometime in May 1931 of Louise Geissler, a close friend of Roy, who had accompanied him to China as his secretary. She had come to India to meet Roy. The police had welcomed her visit as they thought that it would be easier then to find and arrest Roy by keeping a close watch on Louise Geissler's movements. The task of arranging a meeting between Roy and Louise

Geissler was assigned to Maniben. It was a very difficult task as the police had kept a close watch on Geissler's movements. We had arranged to keep her at the place of Dr. G. Y. Chitnis which was within walking distance from Maniben's residence. They met often during those days and one day Maniben arranged for Louise Geissler's meeting with Roy. It was a daring act, but Maniben accomplished it successfully. She was able to arrange a couple of meetings between them. Later Louise went to Lucknow where Brajesh Singh had arranged for her stay. After Roy's arrest, she was arrested with Brajesh Singh and then brought to Bombay for deportation. We tried to avoid the deportation by arranging her marriage with one of us who was not married until then. But the police was too quick for us and deported her under the Foreigners' Act before our arrangements could materialise. This short episode with Lousie brought Maniben in closer contact with Roy.

We all called ourselves Royists and were keen on following his line in the political field. But few of us had direct contact with him. During the days of his underground existence Roy's line was expounded and explained to us by Tayab Shaikh, who had met him in Berlin and had longer and closer contact with him than any one of us could claim. He was very active and intelligent and had authority in the group as the closest associate of Roy. But on a couple of occasions his interpretation of Roy's desires created difficulties for us. One occasion was when he insisted on our propaganda about "so-called Roy" even after his arrest. He thought that our identification of the arrested person as M. N. Roy would create difficulty for Roy and would weaken his defence in the case against him. So for about a week or so we were carrying on our propaganda against the Government for arresting the so-called

Roy. It was difficult to carry on any effective propaganda in that manner. Later Roy learnt about it and sent a message to us to drop the word "so-called Roy" as it was silly to use the word "so-called" when he had himself disclosed his identity to the police. A few days later we thought of arranging a day's protest strike of textile workers in Bombay, to give expression of their feeling of anger and resentment against the arrest of Roy. In those days to organise such protest strikes was the fashion. We did not desire to go against it and, to prove our influence over the textile workers in Bombay, we gave a call for a day's protest strike. The strike was partially successful. It was unrealistic on our part to give the call because workers did not know anything about Roy, the part that he played in developing the Communist movement in the country. Maniben was also a party to that decision. Fortunately the strike did not cause much harm either to workers or to the union which organized it.

Maniben presided over the Radical Youth Conference held in Pachiappa College hall, Madras on October 13, 1935. In her address she dealt with a number of social problems. The following extract from her address will make clear the importance that she attached to the revolt of the youths. She stated: "Youths of today are in perpetual conflict with the current social customs and conventions that represent a bygone age. It is foolish to seek to regulate the lives of young men living in an industrial age by the rules of Manu and Yajnavalkya who represented a patriarchal type of society and an archaic or a feudal mode of production. A new form of society requires a new set of laws for regulating the social conduct of its members. The joint family system with all its rules and regulations and modes of behaviour has outlived its utility and can no longer hold within its framework the growing forces

of the Indian society. The youth thrown suddenly in the midst of modern industrial activity finds these feudal restrictions of the 13th century galling and destructive of his personal freedom and initiative and naturally rebels against them. This revolt of the youths takes many forms, some of them exaggerated and ludicrous but on the whole they represent a healthy and progressive tendency in the society. You cannot condemn a movement against age-old social restrictions and for greater personal freedom, initiative and development only because of a few excesses committed by over-zealous persons. The social revolt of the youths against caste, joint-family, conventional marriages, religious superstitions, social taboos, etc. deserves to be encouraged and suported by all progressive elements in the society."

She made a strong plea at the conference for the radicalisation of the Congress and its conversion into a fighting organ of the masses.

Maniben contested election to the Municipal Corporation of Bombay in 1932. She was elected to the Corporation from the Mandvi Ward. She was a member of the Corporation for three years. During that period she was a member of the Tramways and Telephones Committee, of the Markets and Gardens Committee, and of the Consultative Committee appointed by the Corporation for religious education of Hindu students, and of the Consultative Committee for revising the policy of granting licences to hawkers and abolition of encroachments. She represented the Corporation on the Mahila Seva Mandal and the Hindu Womens' Rescue Home. She won many friends in the Corporation by the interest that she took in its affairs and by the sweet reasonableness that she exhibited in all her speeches and other activities. She contested the election again in 1935. She was elected. But the election was set aside. She did not contest again.

Early in 1935, there were reports about the serious illness in jail of M. N. Roy. It was, therefore, decided to organise a campaign demanding the release of Roy or provision of better medical facilities to him. The campaign was organised at many places. In connection with that campaign Maniben toured U. P. in the month of December. She visited a number of places in the province like Kanpur, Lucknow and Allahabad and met a large number of prominent leaders of various political parties. The main result of the campaign was Roy's transfer to Dehra Dun where the climate was better than in places like Bareill and Allahabad.

Maniben was by this time one of the recognised labour leaders of Bombay. On their behalf we organised May Day meetings in 1932. Maniben was one of the prominent speakers at the meeting held in Dongri Maidan. She spoke in her usual impassioned manner about the miseries of the workers and of how the Government and the capitalists were jointly exploiting them. The speech led to her arrest and prosecution. Three other Royists were arrested for similar speeches on the same day at other places. They were Dr. M. R. Shetty, Shris Abdul Majid and Charles Mascarenhas.

This was the first prosecution of Maniben. It was under sections 124 A (sedition and spreading disaffection) and 153 A (inciting hatred between classes) of the Indian Penal Code. She was convicted in the lower court and sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment. Later there was an appeal in the High Court. The High Court acquitted her of the offence under Section 153A and reduced the sentence under section 124A to a fine of Rs. 300/-. The others were not that lucky. Each one of them had to spend over a year in jail. That enabled them to spread Royist thought amongst Congress Satyagrahis in jails. As a result some of

them became Royists and many became sympathetic to the Royist programme.

After her release from jail according to the High Court judgement, Maniben resumed her usual activities in the trade union and political fields. She was in demand everywhere as a speaker on political and trade union topics. She accepted as many invitations as she could. Her speeches were impressive and liked by all. She had also to do day to day work for many trade unions as well as political organizations. Those were the days of rising discontent in the political as well as trade union fields. The Civil Disobedience Movement was drawing to a close, but that did not mean the end of political discontent. On the economic front wage cuts and retrenchments continued in all industries. The discontent was particularly rife amongst the textile workers. The millowners were resorting to rationalisation as well as wagecuts to reduce their costs of production. This was hurting the workers immensely.

The case against Maniben under section 124A and 153A is extensively reported in 34 Bombay Law Reporter under the heading Emperor v. Maniben. The High Court held that "the accused had committed no offence punishable under 153A, Indian Penal Code, as the speech was not strong enough to promote or attempt at promoting the feeling of enmity or hatred against the capitalists, apart from the fact whether they constituted or not a class within the meaning of the section." Under 124A the Court held that "the whole effect of the speech was to suggest to the hearer that the Government was taking sides against them and taking part of the opponents and that to make a charge of gross partiality of that sort against the Government was calculated to inspire the feeling of enmity and disaffection towards the

Government, which was penalised by section 124A of the Indian Penal Code." The other sitting judge Nanavati J. did not agree with this statement, but in view of the lenient sentence that was going to be passed, he did not think it necessary to write a separate dissenting judgement.

The name of M. N. Roy was mentioned serveral times in the course of the trial and also in the two judgements. In the High Court, it was pointed out that Maniben had exhorted in her speech that workers should follow the method suggested by M. N. Roy as neither the terrorist method nor the Congress method would lead them towards "their goal of establishing labour rule."

The observation made in the judgement by Beaumont C. J. that "Maniben had expressed regrets for any phrases in her speech which went beyond her real intenion," and, "that she says she does not intend to make objectionable speeches in the future" does not seem to be warranted. Maniben's friends were not able to find out who gave instructions to her lawyer, Mr. Talyarkhan to make that statement. Maniben all along stoutly denied that she had ever given any such instruction to her lawyer. Her actions after her release from jail do not support her giving any undertaking of the type mentioned by the Chief Justice. Immediately after her release, she resumed her activities in trade union and political fields and continued speaking with the same vigour and style as before.

The AITUC had to take notice of the grave discontent and suggest some action. It was decided that an All India Textile Workers' conference should be held in Bombay in January 1934 to consider the proposal of an All India general strike of textile workers. The All India conference met in Bombay on January 28. Maniben took a prominent part in organizing the conference as well as in the activities that followed it. The conference was

attended by the representatives of textile workers from Bombay, Nagpur, Kanpur, Sholapur, and many other places. It unanimously decided to organize an indefinite strike of textile workers all over India from April 24 as a protest against the policy of wage cuts and retrenchments that had been adopted by the mill owners. The strike took place accordingly in Bombay and a couple of other centres as scheduled. It was preceded by intensive propaganda. Maniben took a prominent part in that agitation and propaganda. The strike was almost complete in Bombay but was partial in various other centres. The strike in Bombay continued for about 2 months and was called off in July in an orderly manner. Maniben was a member of the Council of Action appointed by the conference. She was also a member of the strike committee that was appointed in Bombay for conducting the strike. She was in charge of the Delisle Road-Byculla Sector. Meetings and morchas were a daily feature of the strike. Maniben took a regular part in those activities. There were minor scuffles with the police when they stopped a procession or dispersed a meeting. Some of them resulted in prosecutions. Maniben was involved in many of them.

The Government was opposed to the strike. They expected the strike to collapse early. But when that did not happen they decided to take offensive measures against the strike. Several leaders of the strike were arrested under the Public Safety Act and detained in order to deprive the strikers of their guidance. Maniben was one of the leaders who were detained. She was detained in the Arthur Road Jail while the rest of the leaders who were males were detained in the Byculla Jail. The male leaders were all kept in a small bungalow in the jail while, there being no female detenus, Maniben had to live alone in the Arthur Road Jail. The detention was therefore far more trouble-

some and inconvenient in her case. The detention continued for about two months. As the strike was collapsing the leaders were released. Later they met together along with others who had continued to lead the strike and decided to call it off.

Later the Government of Bombay decided to launch a prosecution against eight of the leaders under section 17 of the Trade Disputes Act. The charge against the eight leaders was that they organized the strike to bring pressure upon the Government to consider the demand of the strikers, while causing inconvenience to the public. Maniben was one of the eight leaders who were prosecuted. The case was tried before Sir H. P. Dastoor, the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Bombay. Voluminous evidence was laid before the Magistrate. After considering the prosecution evidence and defence arguments, the Magistrate decided that the case was not proved and released the accused. The Government went in appeal to the High Court. They engaged the Advocate General to argue the appeal on their behalf. The High court upheld the decision of the Magistrate on the ground that there was no evidence that the strike caused serious inconvenience to the public as required by section 17 of the Trade Disputes Act. All the accused were acquitted. This was another important episode in Maniben's life. The case was essentially political though it arose out of a trade dispute.

Maniben was steeped in the culture of class struggle and class war when she joined the labour movement early in the Thirties'. A trade union is an organ of class struggle had declared Com. Roy in the platform of unity that he propounded about that time. The labour area in Parel was ringing with cries of "down with capitalism and imperialism" and "long live the revolution". Red flags were flying from many masts in Parel. Processions, big and

small, with flags flying could be seen from time to time on many roads. They used to be accompanied by small and big contingents of policemen. Sometimes there would be a clash between processionists and policemen. And sometimes Maniben would be in the midst of the clash.

In the early part of the Thirties' there were many such occasions. Later they became progressively less and less. Maniben began to pay more attention to the constructive side of trade unions. Trade unions ceased to be mere organs of class struggle. They became more and more organs of collective bargaining and also of securing concessions and benefits from employers. A trade union must, it was realised, enable workers to stand on their own legs and bargain effectively with employers. A bargain will cover many things right from wages and hours to pensions, houses and education. Maniben's trade union work embaced all these and many other demands of workers.

About this time there was a change in the economic condition. Trade and industries started growing and there was an increase in the demand for labourers. Wage cuts and retrenchments stopped and one major grievance of the workers was removed. This applied to textile as well as other industries. The Trade Union Movement began to grow and a number of new unions came into existence. By this time the communists also changed their tactics and were now eager to rejoin the AITUC. They rejoined in 1934 and the general strike of textile workers was one of the major joint actions taken together by the communists and others including the Royists. Maniben was closely associated with all these efforts for unity. The political situation also underwent a change about this time.

Varied Activities

In the next decade or so Maniben carried on a number of varied activities. They improved her position in the political and the trade union world. People began to look to her as a person of immense promise. With the growth of economic crisis, trade unions found themselves. helpless to do anything effective. They could not stop the wage-cuts or retrenchments and dismissals. They could not also oppose effectively the revision of wages, and in those days revision meant a lowering of wages. Many strikes took place during the period, but in most cases they made matters worse. Frustrated in the matter of getting any economic gains many trade unions turned their attention. for the time being, to political work. On the political front there were more hopeful signs. Political reforms were in sight. The Simon Commission had come and gone and made a report which was very disappointing. Later, three Round Table Conferences were held, but they ended in failure, as the British Government was not prepared to part with any power and also owing to differences on the communal issue. Later a Joint Parliamentary Commission (JPC) was appointed and it had produced a report. It fell far short of the expectations of the people. The AITUC shared the disappointment and resentment of the national movement. The AITUC was by that time closely associated with the Royists. Maniben was for some time its General Secretary and then functioned as its President for some time.

Opposition to the JPC brought the AITUC and the National Congress (INC) closer together and it was resolved to organise a joint campaign against it. Maniben had taken a prominent part in launching this idea of joint campaign. Many meetings were held all over the country. About this time the Congress Socialist Party was formed and Maniben joined it hoping that it would build up a left wing in the Congress. The party helped the growing collaboration between AITUC and INC. The highlight of the collaboration was the 15th session of AITUC held in Bombay in May 1936. Maniben presided over the session. At her instance it was decided that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then the President of the Indian National Congress, should be specially invited to the session. He spoke to the workers about their problems and assured them support of his organization. He appealed to them at the same time to join the National Movement and work for its success. Maniben spoke in similar terms. She emphasised workers' struggle for their immediate demands, but at the same time urged them not to lose sight of the duty to fight for national independence. The session was an expression of close solidarity that had developed at that time between the trade union movement and the Indian National Congress. There was no difference in the AITUC at that time over relations with the INC. The Communists had by this time changed their line and were anxious to work with the Indian National Congress. They had already joined the AITUC dissolving their separate Red Trade Union Congress.

The Government, however, went ahead with its policy of repression. Leaders like Shri R. S. Ruikar, President of the AITUC, were arrested several times along with many other important trade unionists all over the country. Prosecutions under sections 124A and 153A of the IPC were

common. The Government also made liberal use of the Police Acts for externing or detaining trade union workers. In July 1934 the Government of India declared the Communist Party of India and its committees, sub-committees and branches as unlawful associations under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. A number of other subsidary organizations, including trade unions controlled by the Communists, were also declared illegal.

After 1934 there was a gradual revival of trade and industries. This was reflected in the growing number of unions and their numbers. Employment was increasing from year to year. That helped the growth of the trade union movement. Many new labour workers joined the movement at this time. Maniben welcomed them and assigned them work in the various unions that had started growing up.

Political reforms were introduced in the country in 1937 and the first general election under the Government of India Act 1935 took place early in that year. In the elections the AITUC and INTUC worked closely together. Many trade union leaders were given Congress tickets particularly in labour and trade union constituencies which were created by the new Act. There was conflict only in one constituency which happened to be in Bombay. In a working class constituency of Bombay the AITUC had decided to put up its own candidate. It requested the Indian National Congress not to set up a candidate in that constituency and leave it to AITUC. In the prevailing atmosphere of co-operation it was hoped that the Congress would accept the request. The AITUC had already fixed its candidate, Shri. R. S. Nimbkar, the leader of the textile workers of Bombay. His name was unanimously proposed and accepted by all sections of the AITUC. The National Congress did not like the name and rejected the AITUC request to leave the seat to it. Under the circumstances, there was a conflict between the National Congress and the AITUC and in the prevailing atmosphere the Congress won by a large margin. The conflict could have been avoided possibly if AITUC had suggested Maniben's name instead of Nimbkar's. All over the country there was no conflict and many labour leaders were elected to legislatures on Congress tickets.

Workers all over the country welcomed the Congress-Ministries whereever they were formed. The AITUC also welcomed their formation. There were high hopes in the minds of all that Congress Ministries would make genuine attempts to fulfill the promises given in the Congress Manifesto. They did some good things like the appointment of committees to enquire into the conditions of labour. In some States wages were raised. But there were other influences, working on the Ministries and they would not allow them to go as far and as fast as workers desired. A mood of disillusionment soon started to grow and the two organizations, AITUC and INC, began to drift apart: Maniben tried to check that trend. But she was not successful as some of the Congress Ministries became indifferent and some became even hostile to the demands and aspirations of workers. The process might have gone too far but for the intervention of the second World War, which brought about a complete change in the political situation. The Congress Ministries resigned a few weeks after the declaration of the war and there was a return to the old Governor's regimes. It was only in 1946 at the end of the war, that the Congress Ministries again came back to power. But in the meanwhile many things had happened in the labour movement as also in the political movement.

Maniben was in Dehradun to receive Roy on his release along with a few others from Bombay, Bengal and

U. P. She had only a few hours with Roy on that day as he had to leave by the afternoon train for Bareilly where he was to meet Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It was, however, decided that he would go to Bombay soon after spending a few days with Nehru and meeting a few others of his close acquaintances. An early visit to Bombay was necessary because his heart trouble and other ailments needed specialists' attention; these could be had better in those days in Bombay. It was decided that when he went to Bombay he would stay at Maniben's place because she alone had a place large enough to accommodate guests. She met him again in Lucknow on her way back to Bombay.

The Royist party developed rapidly after Roy's release from jail. A number of earnest left-wing workers in the Congress liked the position that he had taken and wanted to strengthen his hands. It was then decided to start a weekly journal under his editorship for regular political propaganda. The journal, **Independent India** was started in April 1937 and Maniben was appointed its Manager. There was no other person with as much experience as Maniben and it was also thought that she would be able to get some advertisements for the journal. That then became an additional responsibility which she had to shoulder.

Maniben joined the R.D.P. as soon as it was formed in December 1940. She was already a member of the Roy Group and the League of Radical Congressmen which was formed by it. She was elected a member of the National Executive Committee of the R.D.P. She attended most of the conferences of the R.D.P. and presided over some of its State Conferences. Her association with the party continued until it was dissolved at the end of 1948.

Later, she joined the Radical Humanist Movement and played a prominent part in it.

A couple of years before the outbreak of the war, Maniben came to know half a dozen young marine officers. They had already formed themselves into an union called the Indian Merchant Navy Officers' Association. Some of them had completed their course, while others were on the point of doing so. They came to know about Roy through Maniben and were very much impressed by him when they met him. Later, they decided to take the union in their hands and run it on their own. The name of the union was later changed to Maritime Union of India. After some time they associated Maniben with the union first as Vice President and later as President. She continued to be the President until her death.

The union prospered and in course of time became the sole representative organization of maritime officers. It has now a number of agreements with verious shipping companies about the terms and conditions of service of officers. Earlier, however, it had to resort to direct action a couple of times. Under Maniben's influence it afiliated itself with the IFL and later with the HMS. It is also affiliated to the international organization of maritime officers. For a long time it was considered unique for a lady to be at the head of a maritime officers' organization. Under Maniben's inspiration some of the younger officers joined the RDP and became strong supporters of Roy. They all held Maniben in high respect and insisted on her continuing as the President of the union though many a time she felt that she was a misfit in the organization.

In the labour movement there was a difference of opinion about the attitude to be adopted towards the War. In the country as a whole there was intense anti-British feeling. There was a general feeling that India should take

advantage of Great Britain's adversity. Mahatma Gandhi was originally for full co-operation with the Government for fighting the War. Later it was added on the advice of other important leaders that the co-operation would be conditional on the British Government in India, agreeing to the political demand put forward in the so called "National Demand".

Roy took a different view. He regarded the War asan anti-fascist peoples' war and was for giving unconditional support to it. The view was not popular, but the Royists as a body were firmly of the opinion that Indian Independence would not be possible if the Fascists won the war. They reached that view after a good number of discussions among themselves and with Roy. The difference of view that dominated the political scene was also reflected in the AITUC, Congressmen in the AITUC were opposing the war and thwarting all war preparations. The Communists were of the same view until the time that Nazi Germany attacked Russia in June 1941. The majority of the AITUC was therefore of the view that it should adopt the position of neutrality. The Royists, including Maniben, strongly disapproved of that view and decided to split away from the AITUC after all their attempts to persuade the latter to change its view had failed. That resulted in the establishment of another central labour organization named Indian Federation of Labour.

In her youth Maniben had a lot of young men howering around her. Many of them did not get an opportunity of even coming near her; they just looked at her from a distance and envyed those who were lucky enough to get near her. Out of the many who were able to get near her only a few were able to develop friendly relations. In keeping with the atmosphere prevailing in the family, Maniben used to talk to them ail in a free and

uninhibited manner. That used to give rise sometimes to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Maniben would be surprised when she came to know of them. She could not understand how simple things like going together for a picnic or meeting in a public garden could be so misuuderstood or invested with meanings which were far from her mind. She was told by her elders and friends many a time that customs in India were different and that she should keep them in mind in her dealings with her male friends. Generally she would occept the advice and change her behaviour accordingly. But sometimes, she was in a rebellious mood and would refuse to make any concession for the backwardness or ignorance of her male colleagues. Her argument used to be that they must suffer if they misunderstood her behaviour or drew any wrong conclusions from it. Happily, there were not many such incidents and on each occasion friends were able to evolve a compromise. Thus Maniben grew up, the favourite daughter of an indulgent father with many friends and companions of both sexes, a little self-willed but intent on doing some social work, intelligent and handsome, the rage of the young men of those days. There were many young men around her. But she was not making clear her preference for any one of them in particular. That left them all guessing and hoping. It was discovered a couple of years later that she had already made up her mind, had picked up her boy and was going to marry him. It came as a big surprise to all those who were in the running. They included rich young men as well as some of her colleagues in the political and trade union movement. A see and away and to combiled

Early in 1935, Maniben went through her marriage with her old friend Shri Hansraj Mulji. It was not a happy marriage and did not last long. It broke down in a couple of years and Maniben returned to her father's place. It

was brave on her father's part to stand by her in those critical days and assure her support in whatever she decided to do. It was because of that support that she was able to get out of her husband's place and build a new shelter for herself. The marrage was not officially dissolved because she had no desire to marry again; it was regarded as terminated. Maniben decided to revert to her former status of an unmarried person. She was ever afterwards described as Miss Maniben Kara. In course of time the people forgot that she was ever married though for a very short period of time.

To leave her husband's place and protection was a very difficult decision to take. Maniben hesitated a long time before taking it, Her father's and family's support made it comparatively easy for her. And yet there were many social costs to take into consideration. She would no longer be able to have a secure place of her own with her own family. The society may look down upon her and treat her as an out-caste; she may be excluded from all social and religious functions. In actual fact none of these things came to pass. But she had to keep them in mind while taking the decision. Her position in public life and the support of her family and friends did not allow those situations to arise. Thus she carried on publicly without being affected by the tragedy in her private life. But it left a deep imprint on her mind. She could never forget the deprivation that had been inflicated on her, the deprivation of a life with family and children.

Maniben was intensely fond of children. She had no children of her own. She made up for them by getting to her house the children of her relatives, friends and neighbours. They used to have a free run of her house. She used to have for them from time to time some titbits which she used to take a special delight in distributing

amongst them. She used to remember the birthdays of her nieces and nephews and on that day there used to be a special present for each one of them. From time to time, she used to arrange exercusion for all children to Victoria Gardens or to Malabar Hill or Chaupati. Sometimes she would put a number of children in her small car and take them out for a long drive. Children used to enjoy her company; she was never harsh with them, though she always insisted on their being well-behaved. It was a pleasure to see her in the company of children. She would play with them or talk to them, tell them stories; in their company she would forget the worries of adult life. But she could hardly ever find much time to spend with them.

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Journey to U.K.

Those of us who were strong war supporters, were in a difficult condition in those days of intense war resistance, more particularly because Germany and Japan were in a winning position and were scoring one victory after another. Many war resisters in India were celebrating in those days the defeats of the British in East Asia and German victories over Russia. They were confident that Germany and Japan were sure to win and were advising us to be cautious in our prediction of an allied victory. In some places it was difficult for us to go out and speak. Many of our public meetings were disturbed and some of us had to face stones, rotten tomatoes and other missiles.

Our first meeting to inaugurate the Indian Federation of Labour was held in Bradlaugh Hall in Lahore in November 1941. It turned out to be a very stormy one. The hall was occupied by the war-resisters, consisting mostly of Communists, long before the hour of the meeting and many of us who came in time for the meeting found it difficult to enter the hall. Maniben who was to ehair the meeting had a very hard time to face. The protesters dominated the stage and would not allow her to speak. She stood at the mike and continued her speech though the protesters made it impossible for her to make herself heard. Just at that time half a dozen tall and robust men, who were devoted to Roy for his terrorist past, encircled her and prevented the assaulters from reaching her. Later it was decided to abandon the meeting and the same six persons and a few others ascorted her out of the hall. The protesters continued the meeting for a few minutes and then dispersed. That was our experience at many places. We had similar experience down South in Satara where Lakshmanshastri Joshi was the main target.

The Communists were the most intolerant of the audiences. Six months had by that time elapsed since Germany attacked Russia. But they had, it seems, not received the necessary instruction from Moscow. Their position of war resistance still continued. But it came to a dead stop in a week or two i. e. about the middle of December.

Inspite of this noisy opposition of students and others the IFL continued to grow, drawing larger and larger audiences of workers. Many new unions were affiliated to the IFL at that time. An important activity during those days was the organization of anti-Fascist labour conferences. Maniben presided over many of them in all parts of the country. By this time the IFL was recognised as the second central labour organization in the country and was accorded the same representation as the AITUC in national conferences. It was also able to secure international recognition. The invitation to attend the World Trade Union Conference to reconstitute a body to represent the World Trade Union movement was one test of that recognition. The World Conference of Trade Unions was organized by the British Trades Union Congress and was to be held in London sometime in June 1944. The British TUC had already organized a joint council with American and Russian trade unions which were already engaged in active support to war efforts. Their desire was to broaden the efforts by including trade unions from other countries. They had in due course sent an invitation to the AITUC also. We protested against it by pointing out how the AITUC was engaged at that time in anti-war efforts. They, however, wanted the conference to be broad enough to include all trade unions. They did not mind if one or two of them were carrying on some futile anti-war activities. After considering the invitation, it was decided that. Maniben, Shri. M. A. Khan from Punjab and I from Bombay should attend the conference. The AITUC decided to send to the conference Shris. N. M. Joshi and S. A. Dange.

Travel to England was neither safe nor pleasant in those days. Many of the ships were troop ships carrying soldiers from one theatre of war to another. One could travel only with special permission from the Government. Accommodation was scarce and food was just so so. There was all along the danger of attacks by bombers or by torpedoes. The whole of the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay were infested by enemy submarines and aircrafts. The ships had to travel in convoys. The travel time was usually double the normal time as ships had to zig zag and go far to the West in the Atlantic. Conditions in England were pretty hard. There was rationing all over the country and many articles of daily consumption were not available. In the evenings and nights there were strict blackouts and then there was constant danger of bombing. It was not an easy matter for all of us to decide to go. Particularly for Maniben, there was stiff resistance from her family who found no wisdom in her going to Europe. at that time. But she insisted on going inspite of all those difficulties. We left Bombay towards the end of April 1944.

On the steamer we five were practically the only civilians. We had to be together otherwise we would have been extremely lonely on the journey which lasted about a month. Joshi Buva would occupy a chair on the deck and sit there throughout the day. In the nights he used to retire early to bed. Shri Khan had his own company and

did not need either Maniben or me. That left the three of us, that is Maniben, Dange and me together and we found it pleasant to meet together and talk about various things. Dange was a good conversationalist and was good company when he was in a mood to be pleasant. We got the news of the postponement of the conference at Port Suez. Immediately we heard the news Joshi Buva decided to go back. That left Dange in Maniben's and my company. Half of the journey was completed already and we completed the remaining part in pleasant conversations over the fate of the world, the fate of the ship and many such topics. We had a couple of warnings of air or submarene attacks when we all had to stand near the life boats assigned to us. Happily for us the alarms proved wrong and we had safe sailing throughout the journey. The day before we were to land at Glasgow, Dange told Maniben and me that our friendship must now come to an end. We were good freinds on the journey, but the friendship could not continue after we landed. He told us that according to the Rules and Regulations of his party he was not supposed to have even social relation with the Royists and Trotskyists. So after we reached England we must not show that we had behaved in a friendly manner with one another. We shall be strangers to each other. I knew the rules in the CPI constitution, so I was all along wondering how Dange was so friendly to us. We accepted his decision and stopped meeting each other.

It took exactly 31 days for us to reach Glasgow in the north of England. It was not safe in those days to land at any of the ports in South and East of England. We landed at Glasgow in Scotland and before landing at Glasgow we had to go far towards the West and then take a turn to the East as far to the north as Scotland. A night's journey brought us to London the next morning.

We had not intimated, as it could not be done in those days, to our friend, Shri A. K. Pillai in London, the exact date of our arrival. But Dange had made arrangements for his friends to know his date of arrival. He left with his friends and, as agreed earlier, he did not give us any recognition nor did his friends know that we were on friendly terms with him. Later three of us went to our office on Fleet Street, but found that it was closed and would not open for another couple of hours. Maniben took us then to the office of the India Society whose representative was in Bombay a couple of months earlier. He gave us all a cordial reception and allowed us the use of his telephone. We began our search for accommodation. After some time we came to know that the British TUC had arranged accommodation for us at a hotel on the Russal Street. We immediately rushed to the place and secured our accommodation. It was a small hotel in a less noisy part of London, but not too far away from the centre of the city. We got three separate rooms. We occupied them and used them until our departure back to India. Latter we introduced a number of Indian friends going to London to that hotel which was comparatively less expensive. As stated earlier, the conference for which we went had been postponed. But the British TUC had arranged a couple of week's programme for us to let us see the working of unions and how in general the British workers lived and worked. They had drawn up a programme which took us mainly to the Mid-West though some places in the south and west of London were also included in it. It was decided that the two delegations, one of the IFL and the other of the AITUC, should go together. We were particularly keen on seeing the normal work of trade unions and more particularly the work of the Joint Production Committees and other institutions that had

developed during the emergency of the war. Suitable adjustments were made and our tour began in about a week. The T.U.C. tour again brought us and Dange together. But the contact was not as close and cordial as on the steamer. We were in London at that time from June to October.

As September passed Maniben and I became anxious to go back home. Khan had already told us that he would like to stay longer and we had no contact with Dange. Our work of securing friends for the RDP and IFL was already over. We had made a number of contacts amongst trade unionists and others and also met the leaders of the newly formed Commonwealth Party and had also published two short pamphlets giving information about RDP and IFL. Our replacement from India was due to arrive shortly. We were needed back home and could not spend any more time in England.

We began our efforts to go back in the middle of September and hoped that we would be able to leave London in a couple of weeks. Our hope proved false. We found that it was much more difficult to go back to India than to come to London. We had been warned about it. But we did not imagine that it would be so difficult. As October dawned we began visiting India House, which was in charge of making arrangements for people desiring to go back to India, practically every day. One Mr. Hardinge was in charge of the Department. He was prepared to accommodate me but I was not prepared to leave Maniben alone in the bomb-infested London. According to English etiquette, Maniben must be provided a seperate cabin to herself which, according to Mr. Hardinge, meant wasting a berth, which he was not prepared to do in those days. Maniben offered to travel on deck; he rejected it with horror. The reason was that

the news would go round; newspapers would blow it up into a scandal. So that could not be done.

He went on making such excuses whenever we called on him. At last in exasperation Maniben said to him one day, "Mr. Hardinge you marry me. There doesn't seem to be any other way for me to go back to India." He was shaken by the proposal and he promised to find within a week a berth for her on one of the ships going to India. There was no difficulty about me. I got a berth very easily. In a few days we found ourselves accommodated on a steamer leaving for India in the third week of October.

In October the situation in London became very precarious. The V2 planes had started coming and they were much more harmful and destructive than V1s. Most of them were destroyed by the British Air Force over the channel. But once a V2 passed that blockade it was bound to land somewhere in England and cause a good deal of destruction. They destroyed numerous buildings in London, Oxford and many other places. We had already stood the test of V1. The test of V2. was more difficult. But we had no alternative except to stand it.

In the remaining few days Maniben and I gave finishing touches to the work that we had taken in hand. We also saw the destruction of life and property that took place before our very eyes. We saw at the same time the indomitable courage and discipline of the British people who would resume their normal work a few minutes after the blow had struck. The danger of German submarines attacking ships had already receded a good deal. So we were able to leave from Southampton and did not have to take a long detour in the Atlantic. Yet we had to travel in a convoy and it took us a little more than three weeks to reach Bombay. Time would have hung heavily upon Maniben. But she had voluntarily taken up the work of

teaching Hindi to those who desired to learn the language. That kept her busy throughout the journey. We could not give advance notice of the day of our arrival. We took everybody by surprise by suddenly appearing in Bombay one afternoon. Maniben's family was very happy at her safe return.

Maniben began her work in trade unions and IFL as soon as she returned to Bombay. On this occasion she had also to devote some attention to the RDP. The IFL had in the meanwhile published "The People's Plan". Maniben devoted a good deal of time to the propagation of the People's Plan. The war was drawing to a close and people were wondering as to what was to follow.

Trade union leaders who were arrested during the war were slowly returning to their places of work. They were strongly against the IFL owing to its support to the war. A struggle between them and IFL leaders was bound to take place. It took place in most parts of the country. The IFL was the loser in most struggles. Through Partition it had already lost its unions in the Punjab and Sind. In Calcutta also it lost many unions as a large mass of workers and a good number of their leaders migrated to East Bengal. The IFL was thus left a poor shadow of its former self in a year or two after Independence. The war which IFL supported brought Independence to the country but, on the other hand, it destroyed a large part of its base. In the next couple of years the IFL disappeared merging itself with the HMS. But its unions in both parts of undivided India remained and prospered though under the aeges of different central organizations. Maniben had personal experience of it when she went to Karachi in 1951.

VII

In The Assembly

Early in 1946 Maniben was nominated a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. She was nominated to represent the interests of labour. Labour had then no vote and nomination was the only way to secure its representation in the legislature. Since 1921, Shri N. M. Joshi had been nominated to each Assembly in that capacity. Curiously enough he was not nominated initially in 1946. The mistake was rectified a couple of months later. In addition, the representation was raised from one to four. Maniben was the first appointee followed by Aftab Ali, the seamen's leader, and S. Guruswami, the leader of railwaymen, and N. M. Joshi, the last one to complete the quota. Neither Aftab Ali nor Guruswami took much interest in the work of the Assembly, the burden of representing labour interests, therefore, falling on the remaining two, Joshibuva and Maniben.

The two represented two different and rival organizations, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Indian Federation of Labour (IFL). In the Assembly, however, there was smooth and perfect co-operation between the two. The two together fought a valiant battle against the Industrial Relations Bill which latter became the Industrial Disputes Act. The battle was of no avail as the Government was determined to get the Bill enacted. But Maniben and Joshibuva were equally determined to put a stiff opposition to it. They moved several amendments, one moving and the other supporting it by turn. They were all defeated and the Bill was passed

practically in the same form in which it was introduced. The Act passed then still continues to be the principal legislation on the topic of industrial disputes.

Maniben always regarded Joshibua as a senior. He was her senior in age, he was over sixty while she was about 40; he was the father of the friend of her young age, Bhiku, whom she had helped when the was going to England for her studies; he was her senior in trade union work and also in parliamentary work which she was just beginning. She had no hesitation in going to him to askfor his advice and guidance. He gave them to her in ample measure. In the next few months Maniben and Joshibuva worked together on many issues which came up for consideration in the Assembly. They worked together particularly in their opposition to the Labour Relations Bill. Joshibuva remembered that co-operation for many years after his retirement from active political life. He would hold it forth to others to copy. There were some issues on which they held contrary opinions. The most important amongst them was the issue of the second world war. Joshibuva was, like all nationalists, for opposing it, while Maniben, the true Royist that she was, was for support and co-operation. The difference, though vital, never came in the way of their friendship and co-operation.

Those were the days of far reaching political developments. The Empire was reaching its end and a new democratic policy was taking its place. There were quarrels and differences of opinion about the exact shape of events to follow. Communal forces were gathering strength and threatening a civil war. The future appeared to be uncertain and dark. The Central Legislative Assembly should have taken charge of the situation and worked out a solution. As a member, Maniben would have been then at the centre of developments. But the

political leaders of the country decided, with the support of the British rulers, to ignore the Assembly and bring into existence a new body, the Constituent Assembly to take command of the situation, frame a new constitution and conduct the affairs of the country. That put an end to the legislative career of Maniben which continued only for about a year and a half. That was a grave loss for the country for during the short period that she was a member of the Assembly she had shown great promise of her parliamentary abilities. Such small misfortunes are, however, inevitable when big events like the advent of Independence take place. Maniben never regretted this cutting short of her parliamentary career. She welcomed, on the other hand, adult franchise and doing away with the practice of nomination.

Though a labour representative, Maniben took interest in all problems that came before the Assembly. She had before her the fine example set by Joshibuva. She paid special attention to matters affecting labour; she did not neglect others. She was keen in particular to give expression to her views about the war which were not in keeping with the trend of opinion in that gathering. The Assembly, except for Government officials and a few othersconsisted mostly of war, resisters and neutralists. They were always inclined to deride and make fun of India's war efforts. Maniben resented this attitude and forcefully put forward her views on the anti-Fascist character of the war. In the course of a debate on the Armed Forces Emergency Duties Bill she boldly stated, "to say that India was never at war with either Japan or Germany is on the face of it a misstatement of facts." Continuing she asserted, "India was at war with Germany and Japan. India was not defended by a mercenary army, as is stated, but by millions and millions of the people of India and

as such they have a share in winning this war." Differing from those who contended that India did not gain anything as a result of the war, she asked, "Don't you have your independence as a result of the war?" She asked: "Don't you have your independence as a result of this war? Is not the National Government a result of the victory over the Axis Powers?" She stated further: "And as one of the nations that contributed to the defeat of the Axis powers, India has a rightful claim to say that she took her legitimate place in defeating Fascism." Many in the Assembly did not like these words. They tried to interrupt Maniben, but brushing aside the interruptions, she said "To say that British imperialism is alive is not to know the facts. Britain is no more imperialist. It is socialist Britain now." She then appealed to her listeners to put aside their racial prejudice and think what they could do for the country. There were many such skirmishes between Maniben and other members whenever she spoke on the issue of the war. She was the only person in the Assembly to assert the liberating influence of the war. Even Joshibuva did not support her on that issue.

Though Maniben agreed in general with the support to the war, she found it difficult to accept in toto the Royist criticism and condemnation of the Congress and more particularly of Gandhi and Nehru. She was afraid that Roy was going too far in his conclusions and inferences from the strong remarks of Gandhi and Nehru. She would not like to believe that either supported or sympathised with Fascism. She liked to attribute their actions to the intrasigence of the British Government. She was happy at the early end of the "Quit India" movement and welcomed the talks that took place later for the solution of the political problem. She was impressed by the popular enthusiasm for the Congress and knew that sooner or later

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it was going to be the ruling party of the country. That did not, however, bring about any change in her attitude towards the Congress members of the Assembly.

Maniben spoke on several issues in the Assembly. One of them was the Ajmer-Merwara Rent Control Bill. She moved several amendments to the Bill, all calculated to be equally fair to tenants and landlords. Her point was that shelter was a minimum necessity and should be available to as large a number of persons as possible. She outlined a scheme for social insurance for seamen pointing out how they are required to spend serval days in unemployment between two terms of employment on sea. She pleaded for prohibition of handdriven rikshas in Delhi, for interim relief of railwaymen, for better housing facilities for industrial workers, for employment of men of the Indian National Army; for application of labour laws to workers in Central P. W. D. and for raising the wages of workers employed in State Railways. In the short time that she was in the Assembly she could do nothing more than just raise issues.

The Assembly was dissolved in 1947, giving place to the Constituant Assembly. The dissolution of the Assembly put an end to Maniben's work as a legislator. Many were unhappy at this early termination of her work in a field in which she had shown rich promise.

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President, WREU

In 1948 Maniben was unanimously elected Presidant of the Western Railway Employees' Union (WREU), the registered and recognised union of the workers of Western Railway. It was an old Union with the history of a number of struggles behind it. It was in the hands of the Royists for a number of years. It was one of the founders of the IFL and had since then followed the Royist line. Maniben's entry into the Union and her election as the President were both uneventful.

But they turned out to be eventful in her own life as well as in the life of the Union. Within a few days of her election as the President, she made it clear to all observers, by her actions, that she was not going to be a mere figurehead President; that she was going to take interest in all day-to-day affairs of the Union, that nothing would happen in the Union without her knowledge and approval. This was new to the usual functioning of Unions in India where the General Secretary was the main functionary and the President counted for little. Maniben changed that concept and practice. She started attending the Union every day and would spend hours discussing the problems of workers with the General Secretary and other office-bearers. She brought order and system in the office, dividing the work equitably amongst those available for work. She was also particular about accounts, making it obligatory upon all to keep proper account of monies that came to the office.

To undertake the running of a Railway Union was a new experience for Maniben. The unions with which she had been associated so far were all small unrecognised unions where there were hardly, except during strikes, any meaningful talks or discussions with employers. Union leaders and employers usually met each other as adversaries. There were no rules and regulations to determine their conduct towards each other. The employer was the sole authority to lay down the law which every employee had to accept. Things were entirely different in a Railway Union, particulary if it were a recognised Union. There are rules and regulations on every single aspect of Railway operation including the recognition of unions and Railway's dealings with them. Not that they have made the life of Railway workers any easier or the working of their unions any smoother. But they are there and have to be observed by all. Maniben had, in the first place, to get acquainted with them. It was not easy, for they are so many and additions and alterations take place from time to time. With her natural intelligence she acquired a working knowledge of as many as were necessary and for the rest decided to rely upon the advice and experience of railwaymen and others who worked in the Union. This partnership which continued throughout her years in the Union was very fruitful bringing credit to her and also to others who worked with her.

Maniben joined the Union as the President and held that post until the end of her life. There was never any contest for the post. Other posts were contested but never the post of the President. In all elections there used to be only one nomination for the post of the President and Maniben used to be elected to the post unanimously and with loud cheers. Towards the end of her life, Maniben wanted to retire from the Presidentship owing to failing health. But nobody would listen to it and she had to continue. She held that post for 25 years and guided the

Union skillfully and successfully through some of its most difficult periods.

For a Railway Union, to lose recognition is the most heavy penalty that can be imposed upon it. During Maniben's presidency it was imposed upon the union a couple of times. The first time was in 1956-57 when it lost it owing to its well meaning efforts to establish unity in the ranks of Railway labour. Railway labour was divided for a long time between two rival Federarions at the national level and two rival unions at the level of each Railway. In 1952 there was a vigorous attempt to bring together the two Federations and their affiliated unions. The idea was that the two Federations should merge followed by the merger of the rival unions on each Railway. It received wide support from all quarters. Eventually the two Federations merged in May 19. But the merger of the two unions on each Railway could not be brought about and the efforts at unity could not succeed and were ultimately given up.

Maniben was very enthusiastic about unity. She took a leading part in all unity talks at the union as well as the Federation level. As soon as the two Federations merged, she followed it up by bringing about the merger of ther Union (WREU) with the Congress Union. She was the first to give effect to the unity resolution. Some of her colleagues in the Union did not appreciate Maniben's enthusiasm for unity. They would have liked her to go slow and not bring about the merger of her Union so precipitously. They had no confidence in the bonafides of the workers of the Congress Union. In the end they proved right.

The merger of the Unions did not take place and in the end the AIRF had to be revived. Simultaneously the WREU was also revived. But in the meanwhile it had lost its recognition along with the derecognition of the AIRF. For about two years Maniben and others had to work hard for getting back the recognition of the AIRF and its affiliated unions. Those were hard days for the WREU and all its paid workers. The income of the union was severely reduced, passes and other facilities were withdrawn, representations made by the Union were not entertained. The Union had to shift its office from Railway premises to a private place secured through Maniben's good offices. For want of representations to the Railway and its officials, the work of the Union went down considerably; there were also few visitors to the office. Whenever in Bombay, Maniben would go there for an hour or two. Her visits were invigourating. She would discuss with other office-bearers plans for securing recognition and the progress that was being made in them on the all-India level as well as on each Railway. Those were in substance strategy-planning and reviewing sessions. Maniben was active in Bombay as well as in New Delhi. At the same time she was doing all that she could to build up the strength of the WREU and other unions.

There were many in the country who sympathised with the plight of the AIRF and its affiliated Unions. It was realised by them that the latter were in that plight not for any fault of their own but for their efforts at unity and that those opposed to unity were, on the other hand, enjoying recognition and other benefits. There was a growing desire in Government and other circles to set right that wrong. Accordingly, a decision was taken in 1958 to restore recognition to the AIRF and its affiliated Unions. Soon WREU was again a recongised Union and restarted all its activities with redoubled vigour.

Maniben was more active than ever before. She was constantly on tour of the Western Railway going up and

down from Bombay to Delhi, branches and sub-branches, broad-gauge, metre-gauge and narrow-gauge, making it a point to visit and speak at as many stations as she could and speak to all classes of workers. She was equally keen on meeting the families of workers. She exhorted workers to attend Union meetings with members of their families. One of the unique features of WREU meetings was the large attendance of members with their families. Families who attended received Maniben's personal attention. She made it a point to meet all women and enquire after their comforts and also their family affairs. She utilised these visits to spread her gospel of family-planning and to take the Union into the houses of workers. The Union must, she insisted, look into not only their employment problems but also their social and family problems. She wanted the Union to function as an alround social welfare and assistance organisation. She succeeded to a large extent in giving that shape to the WREU. A good deal of her time in the Union was spent over attending to such social work.

The Union was on the point of losing its recognition again in 1968 on she issue of a general strike. Maniben was opposed to the strike as negotiations with the Railway Board were in progress. They ended a few days previous to the date set for the strike. Some substantial concessions had been secured and that was, according to her, no time for a strike. That was also the view of other office-bearers of the Union. Maniben then called together an emergency meeting of the executive committee. The committee accepted the view of the President and other office-bearers and decided to request the AIRF to cancel the notice of strike. The AIRF did not agree and went ahead with preparations for the strike. In the meanwhile, the AIRF Union on the Central Railway had followed the lead of

the WREU and withdrawn from the strike. The strike called by the AIRF was therefore a failure. Some lives were, however, lost and all AIRF Unions except those on the Western and the Central Railways lost their recognition. The next few months had then to be devoted to get hack recognition and secure relief and redress to those who had suffered for their participation in the strike. In spite of her opposition to the strike, Maniben took a prominent part in that work. This was not the first or the last time that Maniben worked for securing relief to those who had acted against her advice. This is the normal work that falls to the lot of an influential trade union leader.

The second time the Uniou lost recognition was after the general strike of railwaymen in 1974. Maniben was not in favour of that strike. She wanted it to be avoided. She made vigorous efforts to avoid it until it became inevitable after the arrest of Shri George Fernandes, the President of the AIRF, before the completion of the talks. During the strike also she made energetic efforts to secure its early withdrawal. She did not succeed as neither the Government nor the Union leaders were in a mood to settle. On this occasion Maniben had to battle alone. To her great regret she found that her Union did not support her. A strike is such an elemental force that everybody gets carried away by it, more particularly, when one had supported it in the beginning. In the end, the strike collapsed leaving a long trail of distress and hardship for large numbers of Railwaymen and their leaders. In the beginning there was some resentment against Maniben for her lack of support to the strike. It disappeared in no time when she began her usual work for the relief of the strikers and their families. It was remembered further that, in spite of her disapproval of the strike, she had made no attempt to hold back the workers of her Union who had participated actively in the strike. The recognition of the Union was restored in a few months and Maniben was back at her work again at the Union office.

In spite of Maniben's best efforts there used to be sometimes quarrels in the Union at the branch level over election of branch office-bearers or similar small matters. When appraised of the quarrel, she would call both parties and try to settle it in an equitable manner.

Usually her effort succeeded, as neither party wanted to offend Maniben by rejecting the solution suggested by her. In rare cases the matter was settled through a fair and open election. Even after the election she would appeal to both parties to forget the quarrel and work together for building up the branch and the Union. Usually, her appeal had the desired effect. At the Union level Maniben would always call together all important workers and persuade them to prepare an agreed panel giving fair representation to all groups. Fair representation to all was the principle that she followed and it succeeded in keeping the Union together.

Maniben was keen on the education and training of Union workers. She started the first training course for her union workers in 1951. It was inaugurated by Shri N. M. Joshi, the celebrated trade union leader. Thereafter it became a regular feature of the Union's work. A number of training classes and seminars were held from year to year at various places on the Railway and a large number of workers was trained. Those trained workers now hold most of the important positions in the Union. Later, the training was enlarged to include training in family planning. Maniben was the first active trade union leader to

realise the importance of family planning for workers and insist on their accepting it in their day-to-day life. Later she persuaded the Union to accept the unwritten rule that nobody who did not practise family planning should be elected to any office in the Union. The rule was strictly observed during her lifetime and even later.

Maniben was keen on encouraging railwaymen to assume responsibilities in the Union. She approved of the practice of taking railwaymen on loan from the Railway and putting them in responsible positions in the Union. The WREU is now mostly managed by them. She also liked them to enter other avenues of public life. She talked to her members several times about railwaymen in England becoming Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers. That is why she was opposed to the Service Conduct Rules prohibiting government servants, including railwaymen, from taking part in politics. They should have been changed immediately after Independence. But over three decades have passed and they are still there denying to Railwaymen and others a basic democratic right.

It was a pleasure to watch Maniben conduct meetings of the Union. There was a variety of meetings, ordinary propaganda meetings, meetings of the Managing Committee, the annual general body meetings, special conferences, and meetings for particular purposes. Ordinarily Maniben presided over all meetings. But she would ask one of the vice-presidents to take the chair when she was tired or had to attend to some other urgent work. Ordinarily no controversial issues came up for discussion in official formal meetings. They used to be tackled beforehand in informal private discussions where all efforts were made to arrive at a consensus. Maniben was a great believer in a consensus on each issue. She would adjourn discussion and decision for days for a consensus to emerge. She would use

her personal influence to make both parties agree to a compromise. As a result of her influence, a family atmosphere had come to prevail in the Union and it always carried the day, however bitter the quarrel. All leading workers of the Union were familiar with Maniben and also with each other. They had visited her place several times. Snacks or Puri Bhaji was the usual accompaniment of a meeting at her place. Those meetings would continue for hours with some breakes in between. She would not allow a meeting to disperse unless the business was completed, or a quarrel was settled and an amicable agreement was reached.

Business meetings were slightly different. In those meetings there was a regular agenda which was gone through one after the other. Maniben would generally open the meeting with a short review of important events. The General Secretary would then present his report listing the achievements and failures and generally reviewing the progress of the Union. Then would follow a free and frank discussion of the report which would cover everything under the Sun from the failures of the Railway Board, to the arbitrary conduct of a Yard Superintendent. The office-bearers of the Union would be severely criticised for their failure to redress grievances, they would be asked to be firm and vigilent. They would be asked not to take things lying down. They would be assured of workers' readiness to fight. Some of the speeches would be passionate and aggressive. Some would be short and pointed. The debate would go on for a whole day and sometimes longer. The General Secretary would then reply inviting attention to the points missed by the speakers and explaining why the Union could not be more effective. It would generally satisfy the members and the report would be adopted unanimously when put to vote. As the President,

Maniben would keep the order, persuade speakers to speak to the point and keep everybody in good humour by her appropriate and witty remarks. The resolutions prepared for the meeting would be then presented; they would be adopted without much discussion as they had been already debated and considered by various committees. Then would follow elections for which there would be generally no contest except for a post or two. Maniben would then sum up the developments during the days of the meeting with their long—term and short term implications and close it with an exhortation to all to stand united and build up the Union. Then would follow the usual shouts of Western Railway Employees' Union Zindabad, Railwaymen's Federation Zindabad, Maniben Kara Zindabad ect.

For a person attending the annual general meeting of the W R E U for the first time it was always a memorable experience which lived with him for several days. He was impressed by the members who attended and the disciplined way in which they behaved. He was also impressed by their devotion to the Union and also to its President. It was apparent that the devotion was not a mere temporary emotion but was born of a strong deeprooted feeling. The intelligent and lively interest of the audience in the froceedings would also impress him. When he attended these meetings year after year and actively participated in them he would understand the full significance of the grassroots democracy that obtained in the Union.

IX After Independence

After Independence there was reorganization of the trade union movement. Maniben was at that time the President of the IFL (Indian Federation of Labour). In that capacity she took a prominent part in that reorganization.

It was decided that the IFL and the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat, the organization of Congress Socialists, should merge and form a new organization. After a good deal of discussion, it was resolved to establish the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) as the new organization. The first convention of the new organization took place in Calcutta in December 1948. Maniben was elected one of the Vice-Presidents. During the next few years Maniben participated actively in the developments which followed. The HMS was established as a united organization. It was expected that it would be able to attract to itself all non-communist democratic organizations. Earnest efforts were made to win back the unions which had formed the United Trade Union Congress. They did not succeed. Other efforts at unity also did not succeed. The unions remained as divided as before.

More important than this formal shuffling and reshuffling of unions was the change that took place in the mental attitudes of many leading trade unionists. In the case of Maniben it was a far-reaching change. It went on taking place in the next few years. It made her think again of the very basis of her work in the trade

union movement. When she joined it in the thirties, trade unions were, to her, organs of class struggle. It was on that basis that she had followed the policy of struggle and ever more struggle. But the experience of the last decade and a half had made her wiser. She had begun to ask if trade unions had no other role. In her own work she had combined struggle with service and was gradually finding that service yielded better results than struggle. The service had to be of a variety of kinds and had to include in its scope not only employees but also their relatives and dependents. This service was not essentially very different from the type of service in which she was engaged in her days of social work. In the course of the next few years the area of service expanded and the unions under her leadership gradually went through a change in their outlook and methods of work. It was a slow and imperceptible change that did not attract much notice.

About this time a split had taken place in the international trade union movement. The democratic elements in the world trade union movement had separated themselves from the Communists and were thinking of establishing a new world organization. They held their first convention in London in November 1949. Maniben attended the conference as a delegate of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. She was elected a member of the Executive Board of the new organization, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In the next few years she took a prominent part in the activities of the new organization in India as well as in other countries. She attended some meetings of the Board also.

A conference of trade unions in Asia affiliated to the ICFTU was held in Karachi in December 1950. Maniben took a prominent part in that conference. She had persuaded Shri N. M. Joshi, the doyen of the Indian Trade

Union Movement, to attend it. It was decided to establish the Asian Regional Organization of the ICFTU with its head-quarters in Calcutta, later shifted no New Delhi. Maniben was actively associated with the Asian Regional Organization (ARO) for a number of years.

While in Karachi, Maniben met many old workers of the IFL. They had already grouped themselves in the Pakistan Federation of Labour (PFL). They were happy to meet Maniben and arranged a big reception for her. Prominent amongst them was Shri M. A. Khatib. He was later elected the President of the Pakistan Federation of Labour. He affiliated his organization to the ICFTU. He was a leading member of the ICFTU in Pakistan until his death in 1965.

In 1955 Maniben was appointed a member of the Class IV Staff Promotion Committee. She had to travel a lot in order to unerstand the problems of Class IV on all railways and to suggest avenues for their promotions. A unanimous report was presented by the Committee. It was implemented in parts and a good number of new avenues for promotion were opened to Class IV Staff of the Indian Railways.

Maniben had joined the R.D.P. as soon as it was formed in December 1940. She was already a member of the Roy Group and of the League of Radical Congressmen which was formed by it. She was elected a member of the National Executive Committee of the R. D. P. She attended most of the conferences of the R. D. P. and presided over some of its State Conferences. Her association with the party continued until it was dissolved at the end of 1948. The party believed in free association with trade unions. It did not interfere in their internal affairs. Later, she joined the Radical Humanist Movement and played a prominent part in it.

conscientiusly.

After Independence, there was for some time a good deal of hesitation amongst democratic trade unionists to organize strikes. They did not want to impede production, nor did they want to embarrass the Government when it had just taken over the administration of the country. They wanted to co-operate with the Government. That was the spirit behind the Industrial Truce resolution that was unanimously adopted at the Tripartite Conference held in December 1947. Maniben had taken a prominent part in the conference and was wholeheartedly behind the resolution that was adopted. She wanted it to be implemented

That was a difficult task for any trade unionist to accomplish. On one side there were innumerable deficiencies in the Government's policies and actions giving legitimate cause to workers to protest and complain and, on the other, the Communists and their friends were just waiting to seize every opportunity to inflame feelings against the Government and all established authorities. The Communists had just declared their war against the Nehru Government, the Government of the newly independent India. The war went on in the trade union movement for a couple of years and ended disastrouly for the Communists. By that time they had completely isolated themselves in the trade union movement.

The situation was similar by difficult for democratic trade unionists. They had to rebuild the trade unions destroyed by the Communists, re-establish workers' confidence in their organizations and reequip them to fight their battles in an organized manner. As a senior trade unionist, Maniben had to shoulder a major part of this burden.

In 1951 Maniben was elected the President of the HMS. She presided over the convention held in New Delhi in 1952. Her presidential address was a realistic assessment of the difficulties and opportunities of the trade union movement.

In the next few years Maniben was mainly concerned with unity efforts on the Railways, that is, amongst unions of railway workers. As the President of Western Railway Employees' union (W.R.E.U) Maniben took a leading part in those efforts. At one time, that is in 1956, the efforts appeared to have succeeded. The two Federations of Railwaymen were united and the unions were in the process of getting amalgamated. But long-standing prejudices and vested interests on both sides came in the way and prevented the unity from taking place. It was a very tragic development. It continued the rift in the trade union movement. The two parties which suffered most from it were the W.R.E.U. and the All India Railwaymens Federation (AIRF.). Both had dissolved themselves and thereby lost their recognition. Both had to work hard for the next few months to regain their lost position. Eventually both succeeded in getting back their recognition.

Maniben had taken a keen interest in developing family planning since long. She was the first trade union leader to introduce family planning education in trade unions. She organized a number of classes for workers of the WREU. She persuaded them to accept an unwritten rule that nobody who did not practise family planning could become an office-bearer in the union at any level. As a result of the work that she did in this field, the Government later appointed her a member of the Tripartite Committee on Family Planning when it was established in 1968. Maniben took keen interest in the work of the Committee.

The general strike of Central Government employees which took place in July 1960 was a test for Maniben.

Her health at that time was very weak. She was also suffering from pain in the chest. Doctors had advised her rest in bed. But as soon as the decision in favour of a strike was taken, she disregarded medical advice and took active part in the propaganda for the strike. She addressed several meetings and led many processions. She had to pay for it later when she was arrested in the course of the strike. She fell ill one evening in the jail at Arthur Road, Bombay. Then there was a tussel between her and the jail authorities. The latter wanted to send her to a Government hospital. She would not agree to it and insisted on her own doctor or to be left in peace to die, if necessary. There was a deadlock. It was resolved next morning when she felt much better and it was not necessary to take any urgent medical action. That was an exhibition of her tremendous recuperative power. She would be very ill one day, unable to stand up; the next day she would be on her feet going about as if nothing had happened.

Detention in Maniben's case was always much more painful and troublesome than in the case of her male colleagues. The latter used to be in groups. Even in detention they used to have company, usually of their own liking. They could put to good use the leisure that they obtained, for study or for discussions. Maniben never had any companions with whom she could talk in her detentions. She had to be mostly alone. That was her experience in 1934 and the same was her experience in 1960. Detention became in her case, more or less, solitary confinement. That made it far more painful than in the case of her male colleagues.

The Government's reaction to the strike was detention of many strike leaders under the Preventive Detention Act, arrest and imprisonment of many others under ordinary laws, dismissal and suspension of many employees and firings at some places. The strike of July 1960 did not last long. It was withdrawn on the 5th day. It ended in complete defeat for workers.

About the strike I wrote the following in my Indian Trade Unions: A Survey

"It began as scheduled at midnight on 11th July. It was most widespread in the Posts and Telegraphs Department. In certain areas there was complete stoppage of work. On the Railways there was serious dislocation in certain sectors of the Western and the Eastern Railways. On the Railways, there was only partial stoppage of work, though in workshops as a whole there was a more or less complete strike. There was a good response to the strike call in the offices of the Accountant General and also in the Civil Aviation Department. There was a strike in some Ordnance Depots. It is estimated that between four and five lakhs of workers, constituting between twenty and twenty-five per cent of the total number, participated in the strike. The strike continued for five days. It had begun to weaken, however, from the second and the third day. The JCA officially called it off on the night of the 16th. On the whole, the strike was not much of a success. The work of the Government was not seriously affected. However, it caused a lot of inconvenience to the Government and also to the general public.

for meeting the threat of the strike. The Police, the Home Guards, and the Territorial Army were mobilized in full force to meet any emergency that might arise. The army was also in readiness, but it did not become necessary to use it. A large number of volunteers were enrolled to take the place of strikers. Workers who did not desire to join the strike were given all encouragement and protection. Arrangements were made for their transport. Simultane-

ously the engine of repression was, also set in motion. Workers were subjected to threats and coercion. There were some cases of manhandling of workers and their leaders. Meetings and processions were prohibited. A number of arrests were made. Some of the leaders of the strike were arrested under the Preventive Detention Act and kept in prisons as Detenus. The number of arrests made during the days of the strike rose to the stupendous figure of roughly twenty thousand, as discolsed by the Home Minister in the subsequent debate in Parliament. There were several lathi charges and a couple of firings. The firing at Dohad, the place of a big workshop on the Western Railway, resulted in the death of five persons. Another weapon that was effectively used was the suspension from service of several thousand employees and the termination of the services of non-permanent staff. The number of suspensions up to 31st August was in the neighbourhood of ten thousand. There were many more suspensions after that date. There were also over a thousand dismissals. The news of these disciplinary measures which were taken against strikers appeared as advertisements in all leading newspapers. That had a very dampening effect upon the morale of strikers and can be regarded as the major factor which was responsible for the drift back to work.

"With all the might of the Government ranged against it, the strike was bound to fail. The leaders of JCA ought to have realized it and should not have led the workers into such an unequal and disastrous struggle. It appears they acted without an adequate realization of the gravity and immensity of the action that they had initiated. They set in motion certain forces; after some time they lost control over them, and were themselves carried away by them. They had made no adequate preparation either

for mobilizing the employees or educating public opinion. The large masses of the people had no sympathy for the strike. Even amongst workers, there was no support to it. The utter failure of the sympathetic general strike that the AITUC, the HMS and the UTUC tried to organize on 14th July was a clear proof of that fact. The call issued by the three organizations evoked hardly any response."

The firing at Dohad, where there is a big workshop of the Western Railway, claimed five lives; it hurt Maniben immensely. Later a Martyr's Memorial was raised and some funds were collected and donated to the dependants of those who died. Maniben took particular interest in this work as also in securing relief for those who were affected by the strike.

The Chinese invasion of October-November 1962 united the country as never before. The whole country, except for a small group of Communists, was together in protesting against and condemnng the treachrous invasion that the Chinese had launched. It was regarded as evidence of their deepseated enmity against the democratic way of life that India had adopted and was carrying on with conspicuous success.

There was intense anger against the Chinese and whoever was suspected to be with them. The Communists prevaricated for a long time and did not take a clear stand against the Chinese. That turned the people against them and at many places there were hostile demonstrations against them. It was demanded that they should have no place in the tripartite labour conference and similar other bodies that were set up to mobilise workers' support behind the Government. Maniben supported that demand and actively campaigned against Communist participation in the people's movement. The feeling against the Communists continued as long as Chinese aggression

was a live issue. Later with the withdrawal of the Chinese army and the cessation of the war it ceased to be that important. In those days Maniben addressed many meetings and conferences and kept alive people's anger against the aggressors and their accomplices.

Maniben presided over the AIRF Session held in New Delhi in October 1964. She began her presidential address by paying glowing tributes to the late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and to S. Guruswami, the veteran leader of railway workers. In view of the rising prices which the Government were unable to check, she appealed to the Railway Board to reintroduce grain shops to sell food grains and other essential goods to railwaymen at subsidised prices. She pleaded for the setting up of an independent Railway Board to run the railways as a commercial concern. She also pleaded for the cancellation of the penalties imposed upon workers for participation in the general strike of 1960.

The session reelected Maniben to the presidentship of the AIRF and she presided over the next session held in Madras from 27 to 29 November 1965. She began her presidential address by paying a tribute to the soldiers and officers and railwaymen who had laid down their lives in the just-concluded Indo-Pakistan war. Referring to the danger posed by China, she said: "China was. against India on ideological grounds. China does not want India to succeed in building up the country on democratic lines. If democracy succeeds in making India strong and prosperous, China will lose all its hopes of domination in Asia and Africa." Turning to national problems, she appealed to the Government to pay immediate attention to the pressing problems of the people particularly the workers. In the end she appealed to the NFIR to agree to unity on the basis of a free and fair election.

Maniben could not attend the next session of the Conference held in Gwalior in August 1967 owing to her illness. She sent a message from her sick bed. It stated inter alia: "The Conference is meeting at a critical juncture. The country is passing through a deep economic crisis and is also faced with the danger of political instability. At such a time, I am sure, you will all agree that we should not do anything which will either accentuate economic crisis or endanger political stability. Our progress and well-being depend in the last analysis on stable Government and general economic advance.

"At the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the steep increase which has taken place during the last year has seriously affected our already very low standard of living. It has caused deep distress amongst a very large mass of our members. No organisation worth its name can tolerate such attacks on its members' standard of living. We must resist them and ensure that we get adequate compensation against the rise in prices. That is a demand whose justice cannot be denied by anybody.

"We should explore possibilities of Joint Action with organisations of other government employees. While exploring these possibilities, we should not, however, forget either our own limitations or the conditions in the country. We should not forget the lessons of 1960.

"The struggle for adequate Dearness Allowance is our immediate struggle. But there are many other struggles which we have to wage, a struggle for a separate Wage Board for Railway workers, a struggle for bonus, and struggles for such demands as adequate number of quarters, better working eonditions, better avenues of promotion, etc. Let us not lose sight of these more basic demands in our concern over getting adequate Dearness Allowance."

Maniben helped in securing assistance to the sugar workers' hospital at Tilak Nagar in Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra from the American Federation of Labour. Earlier, she had paid a day's visit to the hospital run by the workers' union.

Maniben started taking interest in the All India Women's Conference late in her life. She attended the first conference in 1958. She was put in charge of the labour committee and was thereafter elected to it from year to year. She also took interest in the work of the Conference in Bombay and helped the development of a couple of branches in that area. She was on friendly terms with many leaders and workers of the Conference. Some of them stayed with her when they visited Bombay.

As a result of her participation in the work of the ICFTU, Maniben made many international contacts. She had good relations with the leaders of the trade union movements of many countries whom she met in the conferences of the ICFTU. She discussed with them from time to time the problems of the trade union movement in India and other less developed countries of Asia and Africa. Because of this contact whenever any of them visited Bombay or New Delhi, Maniben's house was one of their essential ports of call. She was glad to entertain them and talk to them about the problems of Indian workers.

Maniben had cordial relations with the leaders of the trade union movement in the U. S. A. She was closely in touch with the officers of the AAFLI. With their help she was able to develop some educational activities in Bombay and other areas.

On an invitation from the State Department of the U. S. A., Maniben visited USA for a period of about 3 months in 1952. She went to the States via Europe and returned via Japan. On her way to the States she visited

some countries of Europe and on her return journey she spent a few days in Japan. In the States she travelled widely and saw a number of trade unions and educational organizations and also met many union leaders.

Through her contacts with the U.S. State Department and its officials in Bombay and New Delhi, Maniben was able to secure invitations for educational tours of USA for more than a dozen Indian trade union leaders. She knew personally some of the prominent trade union leaders of the USA. Outstanding amongst them were Mr. Ceorge Meany, Mr. Walter Reuther and Mr. David Dubinsky. She new very well many American Labour Attaches (the designation was changed later) who were posted in India.

In those years Maniben had to work on a couple of committees set up under the Industries Development Act to advise the Government on action to be taken in the case of a couple of industrial concerns in financial difficulties. Her colleague on the committee was Shri S. R. Vasvada, the wellknown INTUC leader. They made in each case a joint recommendation. The work on the committee senabled Maniben to learn a lot about industrial finance.

The British Trades Union Congress (BTUC) celebrated its centenary in 1958. Maniben attended the centenary session of the TUC as the representative of the H. M. S.

and saw a number oxirade unions and educational

Friends and Colleagues

Maniben had a large number of friends and an equally large number of colleagues. There was as a matter of fact little difference between friends and colleagues. A person who worked with her for a little while as a colleague became a friend. Persons who met her for a few minutes also became her longstanding friends. It was an evergrowing stream, always tending to burst its banks and sweep into the current all those who passed by, irrespective of caste, nationality or colour. All were welcome, rich and poor, young and old, learned and ignorant, men and women and also children. A few words by Maniben, may be, of enquiry, of advice or of greetings and they would be impressed and would like to meet her again and again. Thus it went on, a constant stream of visitors. It began during her school-days and went on expanding throughout her life.

In childhood and early youth her father was her best friend. He brought her up in an atmosphere of freedom and equality. In that household, there was no distinction between sons and daughters. Being the eldest amongst sisters, Maniben had the most of her father's company and profited the most from it. He instilled in her boldness and courage and taught her to stand on her own legs, regardless of what others might say. He also taught her to listen to the voice of her conscience and do whatever it directed, without fear. The rest of her upbringing was completed by her Christian missionary teachers and

friends. They created in her mind love and affection for Jesus Christ and his way of life.

In her youth Maniben had a lot of young men howering around her. Many of them did not get an opportunity of even coming near her; they just looked at her from a distance and envied those who were lucky enough to get near her. Out of the many who were able to get near her only a few were able to develop friendly relations. In keeping with the atmosphere prevailing in the family, Maniben used to talk to them all in a free and uninhibited manner. That used to give rise sometimes to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Maniben would be surprised when she came to know of them. She could not understand how simple things like going together for a picnic or meeting in a public garden could be so misunderstood or invested with meanings which were far from her mind. She was told by her elders and friends many a time that customs in India were different and that she should keep them in mind in her dealings with her male friends. Generally she would accept the advice and change her behaviour accordingly. But sometimes, she was in a rebellious mood and would refuse to make any concession for the backwardness or ignorance of her male colleagues. Her argument used to be that they must suffer if they misunderstood her behaviour or drew any wrong conclusions from it. Happily, there were not many such incidents and on each occasion friends were able to evolve a compromise. Thus Maniben grew up, the favourite daughter of an indulgent father with many friends and companions of both sexes, a little self-willed but intent on doing some social work, intelligent and handsome, the rage of the young men of those days. There were many young men around her. But she was not making clear her preference for any one of them in particular. That left them

all guessing and hoping. It was discovered a couple of years later that she had already made up her mind, had picked up her boy and was going to marry him. It came as a big surprise to all those who were in the running. They included rich young men as well as some of her colleagues in the political and trade union movement.

Early in 1935, Maniben went through her marriage with her old friend, Shri Hansraj Mulji. It was not a happy marriage and did not last long. It broke down in a couple of years and Maniben returned to her father's place. It was brave on her father's part to stand by her in those critical days and assure her support in whatever she decided to do. It was because of that support that Maniben was able to get out of her husband's place and build a new shelter for herself. The marriage was not officially dissolved because she had no desire to marry again; it was regarded as terminated. Maniben decided to revert to her former status of an unmarried person. She was ever afterwards described as Miss Maniben Kara. In course of time people forgot that she was ever married though for a very short period of time.

Maniben met Roy after her mind had been formed. He made a powerful impact on her. She learnt her politics from him. She followed it unflinchingly for about five decades. There were many temptations on the way, but she spurned them and remained steadfast on the path ehalked out by Roy. The journey was not always smooth nor pleasant. Apart from public disapprobation for not following the Gandhian path, there was criticism in her own circle from time to time for doing this or not doing that. These were petty criticisms which she should have ignored but she used to take them to heart and grieve over them for a long time mistaking them as being directed against her because she was a woman or because she

came from an affluent family. It took her quite some time to get used to these pin-pricks, taunts and innuendos which should have ordinarily passed unnoticed.

Friends and Colleagues

The largest number of her friends was to be found, naturally, in the trade union field. That is the field to which she devoted the major part of her life. She worked in that field at the unit level and also at the national level. That brought her in contact with a large number of persons of a variety of views, socialists and communists, nationalists and simple trade-unionists. She made no distinction between them and treated them with uniform courtesy and kindness. Her doors were always open for them. Some, however, became more friendly than others because of long contact and identity of views.

She had friends also amongst social workers, journalists and writers, politicians and academicians. They used to drop in, with or without appointment, to make her acquaintance and some to solicit her views on questions of interest to them. She would meet them readily and answer their questions without any formality unless, of course, she was busy otherwise. Early in her life a Marathi journalist droped in and asked her questions about marriage and relations between men and women. She answered them boldly and expressed unconventional views. He published them in his journal. And there was a storm of protests. It unnerved her father a little. But Maniben remained firm saying that those were her personal views and had nothing to do with her father or family. The storm died down in a few days. She made many friends and developed many useful contacts by her open dialogue with all those who might be interested.

Maniben's house was always an open house. Anybody may drop in there any time and would not be able to leave without a cup of tea and kind enquiries about any

problem that he or she might have. Those who were a little familiar would, in addition, get biscuits or other snacks. Anyone who dropped in at mealtime would be invited to join meals. He would have to share whatever was cooked. Sometimes fresh food was cooked for unexpected guests particularly if they were from outside Bombay. On occasions Maniben would invite groups of her friends for meals. They were big groups of tens and twenties, when everything was special. Food was special according to the taste of the invited guests. In the case of foreign guests Maniben was particular to give them the best of Indian dishes cooked in a manner palatable to them. Even in big gatherings she was particular to look after the likes and dislikes of individuals. She was keen that those who came returned home happy and satisfied. The food at her place was always plenty and tasteful.

Conversation at her place moved swiftly and smoothly. She herself was a good conversationalist and knew how to keep it going with a witty remark or an anecdote. She had many stories to tell and many experiences to relate. With all these and her stately manner, which came naturally to her, she was always the centre of any group that she might find herself in.

Maniben had around her a large number of groups. There was around her a large group of trade unionists, many of whom had worked with her in the various unions with which she had been associated. There was a big group of political and social workers who had kept her company throughout her life. There was a group of relatives who had seen her spread her wings far and wide and bring renown to the family. There was also a group of personal friends who had watched her grow from one important position to another and looked forward to her further growth.

Maniben used to have from her young age a large number of foreign friends. The number grew as her activities expanded. Many of them used to drop in at her place, some for tea and others for meals. Maniben used to look after them with care and consideration, anxious that they should carry back to their countries a good impression of India and her people. In that sense, her place was like an unofficial embassy. It was also an information house; many went to Maniben to get information about the customs of India.

In this crowd of friends, relatives and admirers Maniben felt herself alone many a time. She had that feeling when she was ill or exhausted or was passing through difficulties. She needed somebody to hold her hand on such occasions, cheer her and give her eourage and confidence. A husband usually plays that role in the life of a woman. But having deliberately rejected that path, Maniben had to do without that support. She accepted that position intellectually, but her mind would rebel against it from time to time. She had to smother those protests with a firm hand. She succeeded in that attempt, but that left a permanent chink in her armour. It was not apparent on the surface but those who knew her closely were aware of that weakness. In spite of that feeling and the consequent unhappiness that it caused on occasions, Maniben never regretted the deliberate choice that she had made between public work and conventional married life.

Eminent Leader

By 1970s Maniben had attained the position of an eminent trade union leader recognized as such by all in the movement. She was recognised not only by the unions with which she was connected but also by unions with which she had no contact. Many trade unionists would meet her from time to time to seek her guidanee on problems arising in their various unions. Maniben would not insist on their following her advice, but those who did, benefitted by doing so.

Earlier in 1970 Maniben received the title "Padmashri". It can be regarded as recognition by the Government of her position in the trade union movement. The conferring of this honour was welcomed by trade unions and also by other organisations with which Maniben was connected.

Early in 1970 there were communal riots in Bhiwandi, a taluka town in Thane district with a large concentration of Muslims. The surrounding villages were also affected. There was some loss of life and largescale destruction of property. The Bombay Municipal Corporation appointed a team at the time to visit the affected areas and make a report about the arrangements for relief and rehabilitation. Maniben was a member of the team. She visited the affected areas along with the team on May 17 and made her report. She was shocked by the destruction that had been perpetrated.

In 1971 Maniben celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her Union, the W. R. E. U. It was due the year before but as workers wanted a little more time for their preparations they persuaded Maniben to delay the celebrations by one year. It was a three-day celebration of music, dance and drama. The main function took place in Bombay, a number of smaller functions took place at various big stations on the Western Railway. The employees participated in them in large numbers, a good number of them with members of their families. At the main function in Bombay woollen shawls were presented to about fifty old workers in recognition of their devoted services to the Union. A building fund of about a lakh of Rupees was collected on the occasion. Maniben was very happy to see the workes' enthusiam for and devotion to the Union.

An influential writer on labour affairs, Shri S. R. Mohan Das wrote a longish article on the Union when it was celebrating its Golden Jubilee. It was published in the monthly magazine Span. He described the Union as a "pragmatic union" and stated: "The union completes its golden jubilee year this month (August 1971) with a membership of more than 60,000 workers and an annual revenue of Rs. 175,000. It runs many constructive schemes -workers education, family planning programmes, and co-operatives, besides the main business of representing employee's grievances to railway officials." Continuing he stated: "After half a century of defending the interests of Western Railway workers, the union is now on the threshold of a different set of developmental and modernisation problems." On the occasion of the celebration of the golden jubilee, Maniben is reported to have said: "I am very happy that WREU is celebrating its golden

jubilee this year. And I am confident that with the leadership that has been built up, this union is quite competent to develop further and serve its members well. This union has stressed importance of trade-union education. And the real basis of its strength lies in the young cadre of workers spread over a large area of India. I have tried my best to impart trade-union education to the present leadership by conducting classes for the rank-and-file, as well as refresher courses for union officials." (Span August 1971 p. 41).

In 1972, Shri S. Guruswami Memorial Trust conferred its award on Maniben. She went to Madras in September to receive the award. Shri V. V. Giri, then President of India, presided over the function.

The AIRF was affiliated to the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF). Maniben's work for railwaymen in particular and transport workers in general came to the notice of the leaders of the ITF and they decided to recognise it and honour it by awarding her a gold medal. The medal was awarded to her in 1974. She was invited to the ITF Conference which awarded it to her.

A few years earlier the International Labour Organization (ILO) appointed Maniben on its panel for the study of women workers' problems. She was able to attend only one meeting of the panel. She was in correspondence with the panel and made suggestions from time to time.

In 1973, Maniben was appointed a member of the Committee on the Status of Women. The Committee was an influential committee with members from all parts of the country. It toured extensively and made a unanimous report. Maniben went with the Committee on most of its travels. She took keen interest in its work and prepared

for its consideration a paper on the impact of industrialisation on womer. The following are some of the major points from the paper:

Industry has its impact on women whether they work in factories or stay at home and look after only domestic work. Industry created the demand for women workers. It welcomed them because they were available cheaper. The foundation of industries in many countries is laid on the blood and toil of women. This led to inhuman exploitation of women workers. It was checked partially by the enactment of welfare legislation. That legislation is now acting as an obstacle to the employment of women. That must not be allowed to happen, she urged.

Raising the basic question if women should be allowed to leave their homes and enter the field of industrial and other employment, Maniben urged consideration of the following among other points:

Women have always worked and have never confined themselves only to the home and the kitchen except in the case of a microscopic minority of wealthy women. The industrial society had broken down the old division of work based on castes. It will be against national interest to keep half the population away from work and in enforced idleness. Most jobs can be handled as competently by women as by men. Women can look after the home and the kitchen as well as do many other jobs.

Turning her attention to the sociological problem, Maniben stated: "With the growth of industries in cities menfolk leave villages in search of employment. Women are left behind with nobody to look after them. Handicrafts decay and many women are rendered unemployed. Men who go to the cities and cannot take their families with them fall into vices and contact diseases. They take

them to the villages when they do go there from time to time. No young man desires to stay in the village and there is a constant flow in the direction of cities. The cities are not able to absorb all of them. They cannot provide all of them either employment or habitation. Unemployment and slums grow in cities and along with them grow poverty, diseases and vices.

Industrialisation is changing all the mores of our life. Our joint family system, which was the basis of our social life has broken down under the impact of industrialisation. With the dissolution or weakening of old ties and the disappearance of the joint family system, more and more men and women are being thrown on their own resources. They have acquired a certain amount of freedom but have, at the same time, lost the security that they once enjoyed in the joint family or in the caste organisation in the pre-industrial society. The process of industrialisation cannot be stopped. It is not possible to turn back the wheel of history. The pace of industrialisation is bound to grow in the years to come. It is not necessary that we should first allow the industries to grow and bring in their train all their evil consequences. We can learn from other countries and, simultaenlusly with the growth of iudustries, take steps to regulate their impact upon the society.

The general strike of railway workers took place in May 1974. It was preceded by a number of sectional strikes which created a good deal of disorganisation on the Railways. As the President of the W.R.E.U., Maniben was vitally interested in the general strike.

W.R.E.U. had earlier held a strike ballot. It was overwhelmingly in favour of the strike. It began, as scheduled on May 8. There was a tremendous response to it for the first couple of days. Thereafter it began to weaken

owing to the big repression let loose against it. There was, as usual, prohibition of meetings and processions. There were also many arrests and some detentions.

In my Indian Trade Unions: A Survey, I wrote the following about the strike: "Fernandes and other leaders carried on vigorous propaganda amongst railwaymen and prepared them for a strike in case the demands were not conceded. They were ready, however, for a negotiated settlement. The negotiations began but Fernandes was arrested before they were completed. Workers had then no alternative but to go on strike. There was massive response to the strike. Railway service was brought to a halt in many places. The Government's response was massive repression. The strike was declared illegal. Thousands of workers were arrested; many were made to vacate their quarters; meetings and other demonstrations were banned; the Territorial Army was pressed into service to run trains; many other methods were used to break the morale of workers and compel them to resume work.

"Negotiations were, however, kept going. Leaders of opposition political parties conducted the negotiations. A three-point formula offering both parties an honourable way out of the deadlock was evolved. Railwaymen's leaders, however, refused to accept it. That was a grave blunder that they committed. The strike dragged on and ended disastrously a few days later. It was officially called off on May 27. Railwaymen paid heavily for the strike. Thousands of permanent workers lost their jobs and many were subjected to various other penalties. Casual workers were discharged in thousands. AIRF and its affiliated unions lost their recognition. Many of these penalties were withdrawn or moderated in the course of the next year so. Recognition was restored to AIRF and the unions a few months after the

end of the strike. A few of the demands were also conceded both before and after the strike.

"The strike began as an industrial dispute, but it soon assumed the shape of a political struggle. The leader of the strike, George Fernandes was at the same time the Chairman of the Socialist Party, one of the opposition parties. The speeches that he made were direct attacks on the Government and not pleas for securing demands. That converted the strike into a political challenge to the authority of the Government. In any case, it was dealt with as such. No mercy was shown to the strike and strikers. A year later when the Emergency was imposed, many references were made to the railway strike as one of the causes of its imposition."

Maniben took a prominent part in the efforts at conciliation which went on before and during the strike. She was in touch with a highly placed officer of the Government of India through whom she tried to initiate talks between the Railway Board and Shri Fernandes. The arrest of the latter before the completion of the talks torpedoed that plan. She began her efforts again when the three-point formula was evolved. She was keen that it should be accepted. She made a special trip to New Delhi for the purpose along with Shri S. R. Kulkarni, the President of the All India Port and Dock Workers Federation. Shri Fernandes and other leaders of Railwaymen were, however, living in a world of their own. They rejected the formula and the result was the utter defeat of the strike.

Maniben was opposed to the Emergency that was imposed on the country on June 26, 1975. She did not, however, join the movement against it. In the first place, she was not at that time strong enough to face the rigours of jail life. Moreover, though she had high respect for

Shri Jayprakash Narayan, the leader of the opposition movement, she did not agree with many of the policies and tactics adopted by him. She exerted herself to find a middle ground between the Government and the resistance movement. She wrote a letter in that connection to the Prime Minister and also joined a group in Bombay which was trying to find a via media. There was a reply to her letter, but it was mainly a justification of Government's actions. The group in Bombay did not make any progress, though it consisted of over two dozen eminent citizens who had adopted a neutral position between the two warring camps, the Government on one side and the resistance movement on the other, Maniben thought it better then to keep quiet until the situation became normal.

That did not stop her from meeting Jayaprakash when he went to Bombay for medical treatment in the Jaslok Hospital. She also helped prisoners by sending them books and contributing to the relief of their families.

In the rainy season of 1976 Maniben's residential house crashed and that deprived her of her residential accomodation. It was a big four storied house where she was staying for the past several years along with members of her family and several other tenants. They had formed a tenant's committee with Maniben as the chairperson and were carrying on some urgently needed repairs to the house with the permission of the House Repairs Board of the Government of Maharashtra. The house crashed while those repairs were going on resulting in the death of three persons. That and the crash were a big blow to Maniben. For several months she had no place of her own. She had to make use of makeshift accomodation placed at her disposal from time to time by relatives and

friends. The repairs went on for about a year. That was a very trying time for Maniben. Her household was disrupted, her work was held up and there were umpteen demands, on her time and energy about the repair work that was going on. Her brother, Shri Shantikumar Kara, was by her side to assist her in these travails. He was also a sufferer of the crash. She heaved a big sigh of relief when the victims of the crash were able to go back to their respective places.

Maniben had the reputation of being rich. Her family was rich, or, according to her brother, well-to-do. She lived in a big place, had her own car and had a few servants. All that was there, but she had little money to spend on herself or give away as a donation. Her monthly expenses were provided more or less on a liberal scale. When she fell ill the family looked after her medical expenses including hospital charges. For special occasions also there was some provision. But apart from these, there was no money she could call her own and spend in any way she liked. That cramped her style. That is why she wanted to earn on her own. She made that attempt in the early years, but gave it up when she realised the time and energy that it required and the poor return that it brought in. Besides she was not trained for any money-earning work. She had to content herself, therefore, with a fixed allowance from the family. The allowance was raised from time to time owing to increase in prices, and increase in the income of the family. However, it was usually insufficient for Maniben. The number of her friends increased raising the amount of her entertainment expenses. She wanted to economise on them and also on her personal expenses. Her personal expenses were the most minimum, there was no scope for cutting them any further, entertainment expenses also could not be reduced further without cutting

out entertainment altogether. But that would have hurt her immensely. So the idea was dropped. She once thought of doing away with her car; the brothers disliked the idea and it had to be dropped. From month to month she had to carry on a struggle to live within her means. Sometimes she succeeded but many a time she failed, adding to her debt to the family. Thus, though Maniben appeared to be rich, she was not really rich and had to scrape through somehow.

About 1975, Maniben's health began to fail. The health that was fairly robust and had enabled her to undertake and discharge many responsibilities began to give way. She began to fail ill more often. Every illness would leave her weaker and weaker. Her eyesight began to fail. Reading daily newspapers became difficult for her. It was discovered that cataract had developed in her eyes. It would not, however, mature rapidly so that she eould get rid of it through an operation. Later, Gluacoma developed and she had to undergo an operation. While these eye-troubles bothered her, much worse was the trouble with her pelvic bone and the waist. She was using a stout stick to support her while walking for several years. That was not enough in the last few years. Doctors recommended use of crutches; she was unwilling to use them. A compromise was evolved by which she could carry on, using only one crutch. She used it for a few months. It did not, however, help. The pain while walking became acute and in the last few days and she had to give-up walking altogether. That was most painful for her. Throughout her life she had taken pride in her ability to walk, and walk and run.

This complete dependence on others even for small things broke her morale and she lost her will to live. Thereafter there was rapid deterioration in her condition. It became clear that the end was not far. She had already withdrawn from most of the organizations with which she was connected; only a few remained which insisted on her association with them till the end. They were kept informed. The stream of visitors increased. It had to be kept under check to avoid unnecessary strain on her. Every visitor was a strain, for even in those days, nobody went away without her sweet smile and a cup of tea.

The smile was, however, vanishing. Maniben was losing interest in her visitors and all that was happening around her. But even then she looked so fresh and so alert that nobody looking at her could have imagined that she was on the point of going away. And then suddenly it happened. The heart that had weathered many storms suddenly stopped functioning. She was no more. Maniben was dead. A life that had known no rest had suddenly come to an end. Then followed tears and tributes from many who had grown with her and worked with her.

After Maniben's death, many friends wrote about her praising the eminent qualities of her head and heart. Amongst them one article stood out for its breadth and incisiveness. It was by her young friend, Shri M. A. Rane, Advocate, High Court, the wellknown Radical Humanist of Bombay. I am taking the liberty of reproducing it here in a slightly shortened form. It will he an appropriate end to what I remember of her.

It carried the caption "The Banyan Tree Has Fallen". It stated:

"Maniben Kara is no more. She was like an ancient banyan tree to her innumerable comrades and friends who used to invariably resort to its shade in times of need. The banyan tree has at last fallen. We no longer enjoy its rich shade. Maniben belonged to a well-knit, liberal and affectionate family of the Karas. She also belonged to another close liberal and affectionate family of the Royists. Both the families are now bereaved.

Maniben was identified with three movements in India; the labour movement, the Radical Humanist movement and the women's movement. She has left her imprint on all the three and has earned recognition nationally and internationally.

To the wide circle of her friends and comrades, what is outstanding is the deep and affectionate concern she showed for them.

Maniben's hospitality is a legend. I saw her last in the evening of October 22, six days before she breathed her last. Shri V. B. Karnik, her companion for 50 years, was by her bedside. She was semi-conscious, in a state of coma. She could recognise me but could not speak and was thus suffering a silent agony. I held her hand and stroked her snow-white hair. That was the only communication between us.

It is customary to wish peace for the soul of the deceased. As a rationalist Maniben did not believe in the existence of the soul. If at all it exists Maniben's soul would be restless. Body and soul (or mind) perish together according to laws of nature and one cannot survive the other. If anything survives they are the sweet memories and sweet deeds of the deceased. The sweet memories of Maniben will survive as long as those of us who were close to her survive. Her sweet deeds and contributions will survive as long as the trade union movement, the Radical Humanist movement and the women's movement survive.

In a brochure entitled Homage to Maniben published in Bombay on the occasion of her first death anniversary,

Shri D. B. Karnik who was a close colleague wrote about her public speaking: "Maniben was a very powerful speaker. She spoke extempore and her speeches drew applause from the audience at all times. She addressed open air meetings at Choupatty and Kamgar Maidan, where her voice would reach the end of the meeting of thousands of workers and would never falter in its intensity. It was during such an inspiring address at a Choupatty meeting that a veteran journalist characterised her as being almost an "Howitzer gun."

He wrote the following about her broad vision:

"Maniben's vision was not limited only to the welfare of the workers joining the union. She wanted the whole family of workers, the wives, sons and daughters of the workers, to be involved in the developing activities of the union. Constructive, welfare and educational activities, activities in the co-operative field, activities connected with family planning, were some of the fields in which Maniben wanted the worker's families to take active interest."

About the gatherings at her place he wrote:

"Maniben however had the unique charm of entertaining people at small groups in her house or elsewhere. She would always occupy the centre at these get-togethers and would make an unforgettable impact on both intellectuals as well as common workers. Maniben's house used to be always full of visitors coming from all parts of the country and also from abroad. Foreigners solicited her company and made it a point to visit her whenever they passed through Bombay."

Appendix

My 25 Years with W. R. E. U.

Maniben Kara

When the Union celebrates its Golden Jubillee, I complete my association with it of 25 years. To me, therefore, it is an event of greater significance, of added joy and pride.

I have seen and watched with my own eyes the groth of the Union. It was a small organization when I joined it. With a small membership of a thousand or two, of whom only a few paid regular membership dues, the Union could with great difficulty, pay a meager allowance of Rs. 100 to its only organizer and General Secretary, G. B. Sukhee. Sukhee had to run about on the railway in those days skipping his meals and contenting himself with a cup of tea or a slice of bread that sympathetic railway workers might offer. Many a time we did not have money for postage stamps.

I am amazed when I remember those days and look at the big organization that the Union has now become with over 60,000 members and an income of a couple of lakhs a year and a band of over a dozen fulltime workers and hundreds of earnest and enthusiastic railway employees serving the union in various capacities. There are many in the Union-I count myself amongst them—who are not satisfied with this, no doubt, remarkable progress, and desire it to grow bigger in size and resources and more efficient in its service to railwaymen. I share their hope

Extracted from the Souvenir published at the time of the jubilee celebration.

and ambition and on this happy occasion wish them early success in their endeavours.

I feel terribly embarrassed when I am given the credit for all the progress that has been made during the last 25 years. The credit does not belong to me. It belongs to the team of workers, railwaymen and a few so-called outsiders who worked day in and day out for the progress and consolidation of the Union. I merely headed the team and was therefore more in the public eye.

But there is one thing for which I can claim credit. In the W. R. E. U. and more particularly amongst its active workers, we work as if we are members of a family. Occasionally we may have differences of opinion but we settle them amicably as in a family. In the W. R. E. U. there is hardly a quarrel over position or office. There is a spirit of accomodation and mutual trust. I have always insisted on the maintenance of that atmosphere. And I must say to the credit of all that they have always responded to my appeal and maintained a climate of family relationship in the Union. I hope and trust that the climate will continue even after I go away.

I also try to bring in the Union, the wives and children of the members. I persuade members from time to time to attend the functions of the Union, particularly the Annual General Body meetings, with members of their families. It has had some effect. I make bold to say that our meetings have a larger attendance of members of workers' families than meetings of other unions. I have taken advantage of my being a woman. I have penetrated into the homes of union members. I have addressed several meetings of their women folks and tried to persuade them to take interest in what their husbands, brothers and sons are doing for the Union. I look forward to the day when the Union family will not be restricted only to its members but will extend to all their near ones and dear ones.

Another feature of my work in the Union has been my insistence on social work. My early training as a social worker and my experience of social work amongst workers in England was of great help to me in this respect. I have all along believed that a union does not fulfill itself merely by conducting struggles for the economic demands of workers and that it must, at the same time, develop constructive, welfare and educational activities. I cannot say that I have succeeded much. But now that the Union is well established with a growing membership and with an established position, it will, I trust, develop a variety of social activities in the welfare, education and co-operative fields. I am convinced that they will secure for the Union big dividends in the form of the devotion and loyalty of members and their families.

One more thing that I stressed in my work in the Union was vigorous efforts to train active workers and develop in them the qualities of leadership. At my insistence the Union organized several training camps and most of leadership positions are now in the hands of railwaymen. I am very happy at this development and look forward to the day when the Union will not need any one from the so-called outsiders. There were also some training camps for family planning. The message of family planning has now spread amongst all active workers of the Union. I am proud of the part that I played in spreading it.

With 25 years as the President and with years growing on one, one cannot but think of the day when one will not be there to help the organization. For the last few years I have been thinking of that day. I can think of it without nervousness or fear.

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I know that the Union can carry on without me. A number of competent and devoted workers have developed in the Union in the last few years, in whose hands the Union will not only be safe but will also grow from year to year. I have that confidence and I regard it as the best reward for the little work that I have done for the Union. I feel happy and proud that I had the privilege of helping the development of that growing band of workers.